

Summary: Harry was sent to Azkaban and was later found to be innocent. With the help of Ron, he will find out who his true friends are. Will he forgive those who betrayed him? Will he be able to let the world know what kind of man Dumbledore really is? Who are the Watchers and what do they have to do with Dumbledore?

Warnings: Hermione bashing, Evil Dumbledore, Slytherin Ron and Harry, language and violence. Very mild sexual situations.

Rating: Ror M for violence, adult language and slight sexual situations.

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FLAMES OF BETRAYAL

By Marietsy

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CHAPTER ONE

Albus Dumbledore walked down the hallway of Hogwarts, lost in his thoughts. His face was grim, and there was no twinkle in his eyes. He had just come from a meeting with the Minister of Magic. Things had not gone well. He stopped in front of the stone gargoyle that led to his office and muttered the password.

After entering his office, he walked over to the floo and threw in some powder. "The Burrow," he called out. He stuck his head into the fire and called for Molly Weasley. She came rushing into the room, and looked at Dumbledore in surprise.

"Albus, is there a problem?" she asked worriedly.

"No, nothing serious. I need your family to come to Hogwarts for a meeting. I will be calling the others of the Order. They need to be here to hear what I have to say. It's very important," Dumbledore replied, his face serious.

"What's wrong, Albus?" she asked, concerned.

"I'll tell you when you arrive. Is Hermione visiting your family?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes, she arrived here a couple of days ago. Do you want her there as well?" Molly inquired.

"Yes, please, if you would, bring her along. I'll see you all when you arrive." He watched as Molly nodded in agreement and pulled his head out of the fire. He ran his hand down his face wearily, the burden he now felt was heavy.

He heard the door to his office open and a voice called out in concern, "Albus, are you all right? What has happened?" Minerva McGonagall asked.

"I'm calling a meeting for the Order. I have important news I must share with everyone. Is Severus still here?" he asked.

"Yes, he just got back from being summoned. He was on his way up to see you," she answered as she gazed at the Headmaster's tired expression.

Severus Snape stalked into the room, his robe flowing out behind him. He was a formidable presence with his dark lanky hair, black eyes and a glower that was a permanent fixture on his face. He got joy out of scaring the children of Hogwarts. He was not a happy man, so he took what little joy it gave him to watch people cower before him in fear.

"Headmaster, I came to give you my report. Apparently, the Malfoys were captured this morning and taken to the Ministry for interrogation. There was apparently a plan of some sort that the Malfoys were involved with and Voldemort doesn't want it to get out. Judging by the way he tortured and killed some of the Death Eaters tonight, he is quite livid," Snape reported with a cold smirk.

Dumbledore sat at his desk, sighing heavily. "Thank you, Severus. I already knew about the Malfoys. I was called to the Ministry to hear some disturbing news. I will share it with you when the other members of the Order arrive. They should be here within the hour," he said grimly.

Snape stared at the Headmaster with a thoughtful look. He could tell by the look on Dumbledore's face that whatever it was, it would not be good news. He looked over at McGonagall and noticed her face was showing worry for the Headmaster. Their eyes met in silent concern for the situation. Snape sighed; it looks like its going to be a long night.

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An hour later, the members of the Order were sitting in the Headmaster's office. The Weasleys were sitting on one side of the office. Hermione sat next to Ron, who was ignoring her. She had a bad feeling about the meeting. Whatever it was though, she had confidence in the Headmaster to see the Order through it.

Ron glared around the room, looking sullen. He hadn't wanted to come, but his family had forced him. He grumbled to himself, his face showing his anger. The war with Voldemort wasn't going well, and he had a feeling whatever this meeting was about would change everything. Still, it wasn't enough for him to want to be here.

The twins were snickering to each other about something prank related. Bill and Charlie had been home for a visit when the Headmaster called. They decided that they would join the meeting. Percy was not there since he still had nothing to do with his family, not that it seemed to bother the rest of the Weasleys. Molly Weasley was glaring at the twins, who were ignoring their mother and Arthur looked at his family fondly.

Tonks, Kingsley and Lupin sat close to each other, talking to each other in low voices. They each mentioned how tense the Headmaster had seemed when he first called them earlier. It did not bode well for this meeting.

Mad-Eye Moody sat near Minerva, talking to her in a low voice while glaring at Snape, who was sneering at anyone who looked at him. Moody still didn't trust the man and he never would. Minerva rolled her eyes in exasperation at Moody's antics. The other members of the Order sat around talking, waiting for the Headmaster to appear.

The Headmaster came into his office and smiled grimly at everyone. There was no sign of a twinkle in his eyes. The people in the room shifted uneasily. The last time they saw the Headmaster this serious was eighteen months ago.

"I was called to the Ministry today by Minister Fudge. Apparently the Aurors had captured two Death Eaters and they were disturbed by what the two gentlemen had confessed under Veritaserum," the Headmaster said.

"Who were the Death Eaters?" Moody growled.

"Lucius and Draco Malfoy," Dumbledore stated solemnly.

The people in the room muttered in surprise and amazement. Lucius was well known for being a Death Eater, but he had escaped Azkaban when the Dementors had sided with Voldemort. The Ministry had quickly set up spells and wards around Azkaban that imitated the effects of the Dementors. They didn't want the chance that any of the prisoners might be coherent enough to try to escape. Hearing that Draco was a Death Eater was not a major surprise to those in the room.

"What have they confessed, Albus?" Minerva asked curiously.

"Apparently Draco was involved in a plan to frame a student for murder. He was to steal the student's wand, kill another student and place the blame on the framed student," he reported grimly. "Harry Potter is innocent of murder," he said quietly. The appearance of grief on his face made him look older.

The room erupted in shouts of denial and shock. "How could that be? He confessed to the murders under Veritaserum," Remus said, shocked.

"Lucius confessed that Voldemort had been working on the link via the scar weeks before the murders. Voldemort slowly worked it open so that he could possess Harry at the right moment. That would have explained Harry's bizarre behavior the weeks before the murders. The right moment came when Harry was to testify. Lucius was in the crowd, under the polyjuice potion, and when Harry was put under the Veritaserum, he cast a spell to make Harry more susceptible to Voldemort's possession. The boy had no chance, no chance at all," the Headmaster said in a low voice.

The rest of the room were stunned. Harry was accused of killing Cho Chang, Colin Creevey and Ginny Weasley during his sixth year at Hogwarts. Harry had claimed himself to be innocent of the crime, stating that it had to be a plan of Voldemort, but no one had tried to help him. They hadn't believed him and the Wizarding World had helped throw a sixteen-year-old boy into Azkaban. All the evidence had shown that he was guilty and the Wizarding World turned their backs on the Boy Who Lived.

Ron had tears in his eyes and Hermione was sobbing hysterically. Hermione had been the first to turn on Harry. She allowed the proof to overcome any doubts she might have had. When Harry had begged her to help him, she had smacked him, spat in his face and told him to burn in hell. Following the example of one of Harry's best friends, the rest of his friends had turned on him like rabid dogs. They had cursed his name, destroyed his property and shunned anyone who had thought he might've been innocent.

Ron had believed in his friend's innocence. He fought for Harry, yelling at anyone who dared say otherwise to his face. He knew Harry and he knew there was no way that he would've killed anyone, let alone the one person he had thought of as a sister.

He'd felt betrayed at the trial when Harry had confessed to the murders. He'd broken down and sobbed, glaring at Harry in anger and pain. He had believed in the power of the Veritaserum, never realizing that it could somehow be overcome. Everyone had told him that they had been right, but Ron had punched anyone who said a

thing about Harry. People had learned not to talk about Harry around Ron.

Ron bowed his head, relief, shame, and pain filling his body. He felt relief that he'd been right and shame that he had doubted Harry in the end. He knew that Harry would probably forgive him for his lapse, but it still pained him to know that he hadn't kept his faith in Harry. He heard Hermione crying next to him and shifted away from her. His friendship with her had not been the same since she turned her back on Harry. She had been smug; her superior attitude had grated on Ron's nerves. She threw Harry's guilt in Ron's face so many times that Ron had almost slapped her. At that moment, she had seen the rage in his eyes and had felt fear. They agreed never bring Harry's name up again, but things had irrevocably changed between them. They had lost the closeness that they once had.

"What happens now?" Arthur Weasley asked faintly. The boy, who he had once thought of as a son, the one he had turned his back on, the one he had believed had killed his only daughter, was innocent. He felt overwhelmed with shame and guilt. He bowed his head and closed his eyes, trying to stop the tears from falling. He took a deep shuddering breath, opened his eyes and looked over at his sobbing wife. Her hands were over her face and she was sobbing hysterically. He put his arms around her and pulled her close. She buried her face into his chest and started to wail. He knew she felt the same sense of guilt and shame that he did.

Arthur looked at the rest of his family. The twins were subdued, their cheerful faces were somber and their eyes filled with shame. They were glancing at the floor with a small frown on their faces. Arthur shook his head, knowing that they didn't know how to handle this. He looked at Bill and Charlie, who also looked somber. Their faces also showed the guilt that they were feeling.

He glanced at his last son and his heart clenched in pain. The family had not been kind to Ron since Harry's arrest. He'd been the only one to believe in Harry and his family had ridiculed and belittled him for it. When Harry had confessed under Veritaserum, the family had proudly thrown it in Ron's face with bitter glee and something in Ron seemed to die. He never smiled anymore and he hardly spoke to the

family. Even now, the family had very little to do with him and when they did; they still showed their disapproval of his actions.

Arthur watched as his son glanced up at him, feeling his father's guilty gaze upon him. The brown eyes looked at his father coldly and Ron sneered at him. Ron turned his gaze towards his sobbing mother and smirked coldly. Arthur could feel the vindication in Ron's gaze. He lowered his eyes in shame and cried. There was more than one boy's forgiveness he would have to earn.

Ron looked at his family, disdain filling him. Now that they believe Harry is innocent, I am no longer a pariah to my family. How sweet, he thought with a sneer. He'd been surprised at how his family had treated him at first, but soon realized that they were treating him as he'd treated Percy. For the first time in his life, he'd sympathized with his older brother and felt ashamed. If he'd been able, he would've followed Percy's example and left the Burrow and his family behind. Unfortunately, he hadn't been of age at the time, and now he had no money. He found it ironic that now that Harry was innocent, so apparently was Ron. He sneered at the thought. If his family thought that treating him right from now on was going to earn his forgiveness, they were in for a big surprise.

"We are in the process of getting Harry out of Azkaban. I'll bring him here where he can recover. Madame Pomfrey will examine him and he will have his own room. He has missed the last eighteen months of his education. If he's able, he will have to finish it. With hard work, he should be able to graduate next year," the Headmaster said softly.

Ron snorted with contempt and sneered at the Headmaster. "What makes you think that Harry is going to want to complete his education? What makes you think that Harry is going to want to have anything to do with those who betrayed him? Those who turned their backs, hit him, and burned his possessions? Those possessions were the last link to his parents and his godfather. He'll never be able to get them back!" Ron questioned venomously to the shamed crowd. "I have my own guilt to deal with, but I never turned my back on him. Even when he confessed, I still had my doubts, but I allowed myself to be swayed by popular opinion and my loving family," he sneered. "I

shall never forgive myself, but luckily I know that Harry will because when it counted the most, I STOOD BY HIM!" he roared.

"Where were any of you? Where were his mentor, his Head of House, his adopted family, and one of his supposedly best friends? You were all so eager to crucify him and now you expect him to come back with open arms and forgiveness in his heart?" Ron asked with a sneer. "There is no chance in hell that's ever going to happen. You all know what trusting someone meant to him and you showed him how little he could trust you. Oh no, Harry won't be forgiving any of you. He's going to want to get as far away from all of you as fast as he can. I'll tell you this; when he decides to leave, I'll be going with him and I'll never return. I have nothing left to keep me here," he said coldly staring down the downcast crowd.

"Ron, you have your family!" Molly Weasley cried out, guilty tears rolling down her face.

Ron sneered at his mother then glanced at his guilty looking family. "You mean the loving embrace of my family, who belittled me and scorned me for standing up for a friend, the one I thought of as a brother? The very same family who killed the very owl that Harry had bought me weeks before because he bought it for me? The very same family who destroyed my property and ignored me when I walked into the room, except to make cutting, hurtful remarks? You mean the very same family who told me repeatedly that I should be in Azkaban with Harry? The same one that said I should leave my home to join the rest of the Death Eaters to serve You Know Who? Or is it the very same family who told me I should've died before betraying them? Oh yes, I can see why I would have to stay for my family," he hissed venomously, the bitterness flowing from his mouth as he glared hatefully at his cowering, crying family.

"When Harry returns to Hogwarts, I'll be staying with him, regardless of what condition he is in. He'll need someone he trusts to take care of him. That leaves all of you out. As for my beloved family, you're all dead to me. I want nothing to do with any of you any longer. I no longer wish to be a Weasley and I want to be released from this family," he said coldly "I would like to invoke the Ritus Emancipo," he requested icily to the shocked Headmaster.

"Ron, no! This is your family. You can possibly think about leaving them. I can't let you do that," Hermione cried out.

Ron turned and looked at Hermione scornfully. "What makes you think that you have the right to tell me what to do? You're not my family, by blood or by choice. You're not even my friend. We haven't been friends since your betrayal. You're someone who comes to my home and berates me for my supposed stupidity. You're the one who joyfully throws out her knowledge about Harry's supposed guilt in that smug, superior attitude and scorns anyone who would say otherwise. Well, guess what Hermione, you were wrong. How does that make you feel? Do you honestly think that Harry's going to forgive you? You were the first to turn on him, Hermione. You turned on him before any of his classmates, his teachers, his adopted family or the Wizarding World. You! So don't hold any hopes of reconciliation, you pompous, self-important, feeble-minded half-wit. And to think, you think I'm the stupid one," Ron said scornfully, shaking his head in disbelief.

Ron looked away from the shocked woman and glanced at the Headmaster. "Now, you can either perform the Rite, or I'll take it up with the Ministry and when they ask me why, I won't hesitate to sling the Weasley name through the mud. This is a one time opportunity to do this without the press, but trust me I have no problem making sure the world knows what kind of people my loving family are."

"Mr. Weasley, perhaps..." the Headmaster began gently.

"No, Headmaster. There is not talking me out of this. It's your choice whether or not I do it quietly or publicly. After all, I'm well known for defending the Boy Who Lived, and I'm very sure that our hypocritical society will suddenly turn their backs on the very family who they had pitied not so long ago. Now that Harry is once again our Savior, the Wizarding World will be feeling guilty for their betrayal; do you really think that the Weasleys good name will last very long by the time I get through with them? Trust me when I say that I would have the support of Harry and I'll be sure to include your name in my little smear campaign as well. That wouldn't look good right now would it?" Ron asked with contempt.

The Headmaster sighed heavily. "Very well, I'll start the proceedings. Would you like to wait for Harry before proceeding with the Rite?"

Ron thought a moment before nodding. "Yes, actually I would. However, don't think that you can use this time to talk me out of my decision because that won't happen. Nothing you say or do will help me get over the last eighteen months of my family's loving care."

Dumbledore nodded slowly, looking shocked by all that had happened. He had no idea that the Weasleys had turned on Ron as they had, but it would explain Ron's behavior over the last several months.

"As for Harry's education, if he wants to be a wizard in the Wizarding World then he'll have to finish it," Dumbledore stated.

Ron snorted again. "Again, what makes you think he cares enough about this world to stay? He is of age and you can't force him. Push him far enough, Headmaster, and you won't have to worry about him killing off You Know Who. You'll have to worry about him joining him. You know that as well as I do."

"Harry would never join Voldemort," Hermione cried out.

"Really? You sure changed your tune then, didn't you? What were the first words you told him after you turned on him? 'I always knew you would join Voldemort. I always knew that you would betray us all. You're just as evil as he is and I hope you burn in hell.' Wasn't that what you told him?" Ron asked scornfully, looking at the shamed face of his former friend. "Harry has been betrayed, manipulated, lied to, and belittled by those who were supposed to care for him. Do you really think that it's outside the realm of possibility that if he found nothing to live for, that he wouldn't join the one person who has never lied to him?"

"What do you mean never lied to him? You Know Who has always lied to Harry," Molly protested.

"No, actually he hasn't. He's never lied about his hate for Harry, nor about his disgust and hate for this Wizarding World and Muggles. He may have used, manipulated and killed because of Harry, but he has never lied to him and that is the one thing that Harry can count on," Ron said firmly.

Dumbledore looked thoughtful and a little wary. What Ron said had merit. If Harry was pushed too far, he would push back, and at the way things stood now, the results wouldn't be good. "Very well, we shall have to see what Harry wants to do. If he stays, then he will need to finish his education..." voices of protest were heard and Dumbledore raised his hands to quiet the room, "...but arrangements can be made so that he doesn't necessarily need to do them at Hogwarts. Harry may not be in the state of mind to make those decisions for a while, and until he can, I will be making his decisions for him."

"Actually, Headmaster, you won't," Ron retorted with a smirk.

"What do you mean?" Dumbledore asked curiously. He knew that the Ministry would listen to him when it came to Harry. Ron could try to fight it, but in the end, he would win when it came to who was in charge of Harry. Nobody would argue against the strongest and wisest wizard in the Wizarding World taking care of the Boy Who Lived.

"You forget Headmaster, the sorting hat wanted to put Harry into Slytherin. He didn't trust you anymore after Sirius was killed. He realized that you were just manipulating him. He knew that you only thought of him as a weapon for your war with You Know Who. He filed some documents with the Ministry that gave the person, appointed by Harry, Power of Attorney. I believe that is what Harry called it," Ron said with a smirk at the confused Headmaster.

"Power of Attorney?" Remus asked, confused.

"It's a Muggle term for a document that gives one person power over another. For instance, if Harry is unable to make decisions for himself for whatever reason, the document states that a designated person may make his decisions for him. In all things, such as financial, health,

legal contracts, where to live, etc. You get the idea. Now, since this is a Muggle document, it has no standing in the Wizarding World so Harry contacted a solicitor, who looked over the Muggle document, and realized that he could make it into something that the Ministry would have to recognize. He filed it with the Ministry and made it very hush-hush so that no one was the wiser."

"Harry also realized that the Headmaster would try to fight the document even though it's legally binding. He realized that Dumbledore would ignore it or try to overturn it so Harry came up with another brilliant plan. He took a contract and filled it out. He cast a couple of spells on it to alter the appearance of the contract then had the Headmaster sign it. Dumbledore never knew what he'd signed and Harry had the document filed with the Ministry, therefore blocking any attempts that the Headmaster may take to get Harry's Power of Attorney overruled," Ron explained with a smirk towards the Headmaster.

"What was it that I signed?" Dumbledore asked warily.

"Simple, if you try in anyway to block, dismiss or ignore the document, you will loose your magic and your standing in the Wizarding World. It's a Wizard Contract and everyone knows those are binding and enforced by magic. Therefore, you have no say in what Harry will do when he gets here. Try and force it old man, and you'll lose everything you have," Ron said with a mocking smile.

The Headmaster's eyes widened, hid expression shocked. They narrowed in anger at Ron's statement. "Harry would dare do this? He would make sure I would lose my magic?" he questioned angrily.

"I told you Headmaster, he didn't trust you. He knew you were a manipulative old man and that you didn't care about his best interest, only yours. Face it Dumbledore, you have no power over your weapon any more. Anyone in their right mind can see how that grates on you. What's the matter, old man? Did your weapon outsmart you?" Ron asked with a sneer.

Dumbledore looked at the young man in front of him, hiding his rage. He may have lost power of making Harry's decision, but he was sure

whoever Harry had designated would be grateful to be guided by Albus Dumbledore. He was sure he knew whom Harry had designated as his caretaker and Remus Lupin would be grateful for his guidance.

"Very well then, Remus, could you make sure to talk to Harry about his decisions? Be sure to let him know that he needs to stay and finish his education. We will keep him here in the mean time if that is alright with you?" the Headmaster asked the tired looking man.

Ron started to laugh. "Why are you asking him?"

"Isn't Remus the one designated to take care of Harry?" Dumbledore asked, surprised.

"Oh, hell no! When I said he didn't trust you Headmaster, I meant you and anyone in your Order. See, Harry isn't dumb enough to think that you won't try to influence whoever he had chosen, which you did. Taking that into consideration, he appointed someone he trusted that wouldn't be influenced by you," he explained, a wicked smile on his face. "I knew I shouldn't have taken that bet," he muttered.

"Then who is it?" Dumbledore asked angrily.

Ron smirked at the Headmaster. "Me."

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CHAPTER TWO

The young man in the cell shivered violently. He curled up into a ball, trying to find some warmth from the cold. His thoughts were incoherent; the images of his mother's screaming and dying were running repeatedly through his head. He shifted his body and buried his head under his arms, trying to block the sounds of screaming coming from his mind and from the other prisoners.

He slowly uncurled and sat up as the images faded away. The spell had been deactivated and his thoughts were now his own. He leaned against the wall, feeling weak. The food wasn't very good and the guards gave the prisoners enough to make sure that they didn't die, though that would've been a mercy. He'd thought he was lucky when the Ministry sentenced him to Azkaban. The Dementors had left the prison when they sided with Voldemort. He figured that he would be free from their effects, but two weeks after his imprisonment -- the Dementor spell -- as they called it, was integrated into the wards. It mimicked the effects of the Dementors, sucking out every happy memory.

The spell activated hourly for the first week of the month and with each week, the length between the activation of the spell grew. By the end of the month, there was a four-hour respite from the effects of the spell. I guess they don't want their prisoners too insane, he thought bitterly.

A small sob escaped Harry, but he quickly repressed anymore from escaping. He wouldn't give the guards the satisfaction of seeing him cry. They periodically came by to taunt him, to get a glimpse of the former savior's suffering.

Harry wondered how things were in the Wizarding World now. Was Voldemort getting closer to his objective? How many were dying? It hurt him to know that he could have saved man of Voldemort's victims if only he could've told someone about his visions. Though Voldemort hadn't successfully possessed his mind since his last attempt at the trial, he had been sending Harry visions to torture him. For several months, all he had seen was the mayhem Voldemort had caused -- the torture, the rapes, and the deaths. Then suddenly, the

visions stopped. For some reason, his mind had closed and Voldemort could no longer send him the visions. Harry had wept for joy when he realized that Voldemort could no longer torment him. He wondered if it had anything to do with the new wards around Azkaban. It was probably harder for the Dark Lord to try to break into his mind. It was more than likely that Voldemort didn't see it worth his time or effort.

Of course, even with the new wards, Voldemort would've still had problems getting into his mind. On his seventeenth birthday, he'd gained his magical inheritance, and it involved gaining a significant amount of power. He'd been amazed at the feeling of power he'd had when he awoke from the magical coma. Since the power influx, he had trained to use his wandless magic. He couldn't do a lot as his body was weak, but if he'd been out of prison, he would've been able to do a lot more. It had become second nature for him to use it, but sadly, there wasn't any reason to use it in Azkaban. He decided to teach himself so that he didn't go crazy.

Another wonderful thing that had happened was that he had gained an Animagus form. He had been very surprised because as far as he knew, a Witch or Wizard needed a potion to help find a person's Animagus form. To his delight, he transformed into a large silver wolf, and though he found it amazing, there wasn't a lot he could do with it. The Ministry had decided to reinforce the wards after the scandal of Black's escape, so even if there were Animagi, they couldn't escape from Azkaban. The Ministry had wanted to take no chances that any of their prisoners could escape.

Harry didn't use his form all that much. It helped sometimes when the effects of the spell got particularly bad. He could transform and the effects would lessen, but nothing really stopped the effects of the Dementor spell.

He would've loved to share the information with Ron, but Ron hated him. Harry bowed his head and a couple of tears escaped, trickling down his face. He missed Ron, his best friend, his brother. Ron had been with him through it all. He had believed him when no one else had, when everyone had turned on him and didn't bother to try to find the real killer. Ron had fought for him and stood by him, secure in the

knowledge that Harry had not been his sister's killer. Harry was grateful for that support and always would be, even if he never saw his best friend again. It saddened him when he remembered the look of betrayal on Ron's face at his trial. He also understood the look. Veritaserum was the one thing a person couldn't lie under. He never had the chance to tell Ron about Voldemort's possession. He hated that his friend thought that Harry had killed his sister and that his faith had been misplaced.

Ron had never tried to visit Harry, but he really didn't blame him. He hoped Ron and his family was getting along now. Pain shot through him as he thought of the rest of the Weasleys. Harry gritted his teeth, rage flaring up as he remembered them turning their backs on him and destroying his property. Molly Weasley had looked smug when she told him that she destroyed his trunk and everything that was in it. She laughed at his pain. The looks of hate and contempt that came from the Weasleys had added fuel to the flames of pain and anger Harry had been feeling.

Hermione was the first to turn on him. That stunned him. He'd figured with all the years they had been friends and everything that they had been through, she would've stood by his side and remain true to their friendship, but she hadn't. He could still remember the betrayed look on Ron's face when she smacked Harry and told him she wished he would burn in hell. Ron was in love with Hermione, but when she turned on Harry, that had been unacceptable to Ron and those feelings died a quick death.

Harry was glad that Sirius was no longer alive to see the state that Harry had found himself. He knew with all his heart that Sirius would've believed him regardless of what Remus Lupin had shouted to him at his trial. Sirius knew that not all things are what they seem, considering his own stint in Azkaban.

Harry began to feel the cold creeping up on him and he whimpered. The spell was active again. He could feel his mind slowly spin away from him and the screaming in his mind began again. He whimpered in pain, rocking back and forth, looking for some semblance of comfort. He slowly became unaware of his surroundings. He could only hear the cries of his mother and the evil laughter of her killer.

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A couple of weeks later, Harry was sitting against the wall, his eyebrows furrowed together in concentration. He had a moment of respite and the Dementor spell would activate in a couple of hours. Harry decided that he would practice some wandless magic to relieve the boredom.

He stared at the tarnished cup that had previously held water. He concentrated and felt the power well up in him and flowed down his arm. His hand started to glow softly and he looked at the cup, imagining that it was a mouse. He felt his hand grow warm, and with a slight pop, the cup transformed into a small mouse. He felt a sense of elation rush through him. He leaned back against the wall, panting softly. He was so very tired, and he felt drained. He couldn't do practice wandless magic very often as it passed the limitations that his weakened body could handle. He grinned brightly and laughed aloud with satisfaction. He had been working on transfiguration for the last couple of months. The cup had always transformed with a tail, an ear or part of a leg, but today had been the first time he had transfigured the whole thing.

He picked up the transfigured mouse and petted it. He sighed deeply and closed his eyes, exhausted. He sat there while he mentally shared what he had done with Ron. He wished that his friend were here so he could share this moment with him. Whenever he made a big leap in his wandless magic, in his mind, he let Ron know what happened. He could just imagine the 'Bloody Hell' he would've received, and the look of amazement that would turn into a proud smile. Ron would clap Harry on the shoulder, tell him that he was proud, and then ask him if he wanted to go play some Quidditch. Harry laughed sadly, choking on a sob. He refused to cry.

He heard a noise and opened his eyes. He looked towards the door and cocked his head as he listened intently. There were footsteps coming down the hallway of the prison. Harry sighed in annoyance; the guards must be coming to taunt him again. That was the only time he ever heard anyone walk in the hallway by his cell. Of course, if it were Boric, there would be more than taunting. Boric liked to come

into the cell and smack around the former savior. Great, he sighed, there goes what little good mood I had today. He'd actually been having a good day, but it looked like it was going to get worse.

He waited until the voices got closer, then shifted and moved to the corner of the cell. He huddled into a ball and made his gaze distant. He didn't want the guards to know that he wasn't crazy. They would be suspicious, and he didn't want them to watch him any closer than they already were.

The guards stopped in front of his door and opened it. Someone came into his cell and called out softly, "Potter?" The person walked up to him and nudged him softly with their foot. "Potter? Harry? Can you hear me?" the voice asked. The man squatted down in front of Harry and grabbed his hand gently, trying to get his attention. "Harry, it's me Percy Weasley. Can you understand me?" Percy asked softly.

Harry had frozen when the person grabbed his hand. He stiffened even further, shocked, when he heard the name of the person who was talking to him. Percy Weasley? What the hell was going on? What the hell is he doing here? Why is he here in my cell? Why is he talking softly to me as if he actually cared?

Percy sighed and turned to look at the two Aurors that had come with him. "He doesn't seem to be aware of what's going on around him. Help me get him up and out of this disgusting place. The Headmaster," Percy sneered, "wants him taken to Hogwarts. The Ministry is taking care of the pardon so there shouldn't be any problems."

Why was he was going to Hogwarts? What was this about a pardon? Did they finally find out what was going on? Did they finally find the real killer? Harry tried not to react, tried not to get his hopes up. For all he knew Dumbledore could be moving him for the safety of the Wizarding World. Wouldn't want the big bad Dark Lord to get the traitor, he thought sarcastically.

The two Aurors walked into the cell, grabbed him gently under his arms, and lifted him up. He didn't weigh a lot, thanks to the crappy food that they served in Azkaban. They walked forward, dragging him

slightly. They walked out of the cell and turned to walk down the hall. They passed several doors before turning again. They walked a little farther until they reached the stairs. They went up the stairs, and the Aurors held onto Harry gently, guiding his way.

They made it up the stairs and went down another hallway, passing several more doors. He could hear the whimpering of the prisoners behind the doors and he shivered with sympathy. After several more twists and turns, they finally reached the large entrance doors of the prison. They walked out of the prison and for the first time in almost two years, Harry saw the sky.

They continued down the path until they had passed the wards, and then stopped. Percy pulled out a small parchment and the Aurors made sure that Harry's hand was touching it. "Hogwarts Infirmary," Percy said and Harry felt a pulling sensation at his navel. The next thing that he knew, he was standing in the infirmary at Hogwarts. He started to sway back and forth, feeling very dizzy and nauseous. I hate portkeys, he thought to himself as his world slipped into blackness.

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He drifted in the warmth, not wanting to wake up. He knew that when he awoke he would be back in Azkaban, and the memory that he was at Hogwarts would be nothing more than a dream.

He heard someone walk up to him and he froze. What the hell? He heard soft humming and the sound of glass clacking together. He realized he wasn't in Azkaban any longer. He opened his eyes slowly and looked around warily. He still didn't know what was going on, and he didn't want to give himself away. Everything was fuzzy and realized that he didn't have his glasses. He changed his eyes to that of his wolf form. He realized in Azkaban that he could change the vision of his eyes by exchanging one set of eyes for the other. It allowed him to see in Azkaban without his glasses. He looked around and realized that he really was in the infirmary at Hogwarts. He had been here enough times when he was in school to know what it looked like. It hadn't been a dream.

He glanced towards where he heard the humming and he could see Madame Pomfrey working busily. She was sorting through her potions, the glass making noise every time they hit each other. He heard noise at the door and watched as Dumbledore and Lupin walked into the room. He quickly changed his eyes to their original state. If Lupin hadn't been there, he would've growled at the sight of them. With Lupin's sensitive werewolf hearing, he would've heard Harry and he didn't want Lupin to know that he was aware of his surroundings. He has to find out what was going on first before he did anything. If he was free, he doubted killing those two would help him any. He had to be patient.

"Poppy, how is your patient?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

"He's doing as well as he expected physically. With all the nutrient potions that I forced him to swallow, he's doing much better. I gave him several energy potions to help his body cope with his extreme exhaustion. Physically he is as good as he can be, and with some food, he should be better in a couple of weeks. Mentally however, I'm just not sure. We'll have to wait and see what his condition is like when he wakes up," Madame Pomfrey replied.

Lupin sniffed and looked over towards Harry. Harry quickly blanked expression and stared at the wall. "I think he's awake now, Poppy. It looks like his eyes are open."

Madame Pomfrey whirled around in his direction and walked over to him swiftly. "Mr. Potter, how are you feeling?" Harry continued to gaze at the walk blankly and he could hear as Madame Pomfrey took out her wand and cast a couple of scanning spells. She clucked as she read the information of her scan. "Mr. Potter, are you able to understand me?" she asked, waiting for a few seconds, before sighing when she got no response.

Madame Pomfrey looked at the two men who had walked over to Harry. She shook her head. "I'm afraid he doesn't seem to be aware of what's going on. That may be a simple case of his mind needing to realize that it's safe to come back, or it could mean that he could be permanently catatonic. I can't say. The mind is a tricky thing and I can't hope to guess how it will heal."

The Headmaster nodded and looked at the catatonic man in front of him. He sighed sadly, wondering if Harry would ever heal. He needed Harry to be in perfect health to defeat Voldemort. Looking at Poppy he asked, "Is it safe to move him to his room? Dobby has asked to take care of him and I think somewhere safe might help."

"Yes, he's fine to move. He should be able to understand the basic commands like sit, stand, lie down and eat. He should have no problem with eating. Dobby needs to make sure that he does," Madame Pomfrey said sternly.

Dumbledore nodded and looked over at Lupin. He gazed at the sad looking man for a second before asking, "Do you want to carry him to his room?"

Lupin nodded his head and swallowed the large lump that had formed in his throat. He bent down to pick Harry up. He picked him up easily enough, even with his werewolf strength. Harry was light and he looked worse than Sirius did after twelve years in Azkaban. He blinked away the tears that threatened to fall. He turned and followed the Headmaster out of the infirmary.

Harry grumbled mentally at the thought of Lupin carrying him anywhere. He realized that they had walked down several sets of stairs and passed through many hallways until they reached a portrait of a young milk maiden. She blushed and giggled at the sight of the three men. "Password please," the milk maiden asked.

"Forgiveness," Dumbledore answered and Harry snorted mentally at that. First thing, change that stupid ass password. Like there is going to be any forgiveness going on anytime soon. They entered the room and Lupin carried Harry to the bed. Lupin laid him down gently and covered him with a blanket.

"Dobby," Dumbledore called out.

The house-elf appeared in front of the Headmaster. "Yes sir?" he squeaked.

"We have brought Harry to his room. Madame Pomfrey wants to make sure that you'll bring him some food. He needs to eat and grow stronger. Right now, he is not aware of what's going on around him, so you need to pay extra close attention to him. I have a meeting in a few minutes, so if you would please watch over him, I would appreciate it," Dumbledore explained.

The house-elf nodded his head vigorously. "I will, Dumbledore sir. Harry Potter is a good wizard and Dobby will take care of him."

Dumbledore smiled at the excited house-elf. "Very well then, we'll be back to check on him later."

Lupin gave Harry one last look, sighed and followed Dumbledore out of the room. Harry mentally sneered at the pathetic look the man had given him. I'll forgive you when there's a cold day in hell, you back stabbing werewolf, he thought viciously. The door closed behind the two men and Dobby turned to look at Harry.

He stared at Harry intently for a second or two and then smiled widely. He walked over to the man lying on the bed and patted him on the arm. "Dobby is ever so glad that Harry Potter is all right. Dobby was scared that he would never see Harry Potter again. Harry Potter was not a bad wizard as they said. Harry Potter is a good and kind wizard. Would Harry Potter like some food?" Dobby asked and waited for a response. After few minutes of silence Dobby looked at Harry, his head cocked sideways. "Is Harry Potter angry with Dobby? Dobby knows that Harry Potter is well. Dobby can sense it. Dobby will not tell anyone if Harry Potter does not want anyone to know."

Harry glanced at the house-elf, startled. "How?" he croaked. He coughed a couple of times and tried again. "How do you know that I was faking?" he asked, his voice hoarse.

The house-elf shrugged his shoulders. "Dobby just knows. Would Harry Potter like something to eat?" he asked.

Harry nodded his head. "I would like something light. I haven't had substantial food in months."

Dobby smiled at Harry brightly and disappeared. Harry struggled to sit up. He was still weak, but not as much as he had been. He leaned against the pillows and looked around at the room. The door to the bedroom was open and he looked into the other room. It was a suite. It had a main room with a small kitchen off to the side and there was door leading to the bathroom. There was a door in the bedroom that probably led to the closet.

Dobby reappeared with a tray of food. He walked over to Harry and settled the tray on the bed. He climbed up on the bed, grabbed the tray and placed it on Harry's lap. "Dobby will stay with you on the bed, Harry Potter. In case Dumbledore comes back, Dobby can feed you. Make sure to keep it a secret," Dobby said slyly.

Harry looked at Dobby in surprise before giving him a small smile. "Thank you, Dobby," he said hoarsely. Harry looked at the tray and saw that Dobby had brought him some chicken soup with saltine crackers. There was bowl of peaches as well. He grabbed the pitcher, looked inside and found Pumpkin Juice.

Harry began to eat carefully. He didn't want to make himself sick by eating too much too fast. He looked at Dobby with a curious look. "So, tell me Dobby, how long was I in prison?" he asked.

"Eighteen months, Harry Potter. Dobby was very upset when he heard. Dobby waited and waited until the Headmaster called for him today. The Headmaster told Dobby that Harry Potter had been freed and that Harry Potter would be coming to Hogwarts. Dobby demanded to take care of Harry Potter. Dobby didn't want Harry Potter's bad friends to take care of Harry Potter," Dobby said angrily.

"Which friends?" Harry asked curiously.

"Wheezy's mum," Dobby answered with a grimace. "Dobby had to silence her when she found out Dobby was taking care of Harry Potter and not her," the house-elf said smugly. Harry smiled at the house-elf. He knew what Mrs. Weasley was like when she didn't get her own way. He was glad that she wasn't taking care of him. He wouldn't have enjoyed it at all. Harry finished eating and leaned back against the pillows. He yawned widely as he felt his body getting

heavy. He was tired and ready to go bed. He looked at Dobby and smiled. "Thank you, Dobby. I'm very tired. I think I'll get some sleep."

Dobby nodded, took the tray and popped back to the kitchen. Harry lay down on the bed and cuddled up to the pillow. He yawned widely, closed his eyes, and fell asleep.

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Harry awoke to the sound of low voices arguing. He kept his eyes closed hoping to find out who was in the room with him. He listened and realized whoever they were; one of them was sitting on the bed with him. He listened intently to the conversation that was taking place in front of him.

"I don't care what you think. I'm his caretaker and if you have something to say, then say it. I don't give you permission to move him, Dumbledore. You know as well as I do what will happen if you try to gainsay me. Go ahead. Hell, try it. I want you to. I would love to see your magic dissolve and the whole Wizarding World panic because you were stupid enough to try and do something you were not supposed to," Ron said snidely.

Dumbledore sighed heavily and looked at Ron with a benevolent expression. "Mr. Weasley..." he began.

"Don't call me that," Ron hissed venomously.

"Ron, he will be safe where I take him," Dumbledore said gently.

"I said no, Headmaster. You were all for letting him stay here when you thought you had control of him, but now that you don't, you're trying to remove him from Hogwarts and away from me. I'm letting you know now that you can't move him without my expressed permission, nor may you have anyone else move him. If that happens, then it'll be a breach of contract and you'll lose your magic. I don't give a damn if you like it or not. You'll just have to deal with it. Now, leave this room before you wake him," Ron demanded coldly.

There was a moment of silence before Dumbledore sighed, exasperated. "Very well, Ron. You do know that he's catatonic, don't you? He's not aware of you, or anything else for that matter," Dumbledore explained.

"I don't care. I need to make my apologies to him in private. Please leave," Ron said firmly.

Harry heard the Headmaster walk out of the bedroom and make his way to the door. A moment later, he heard the door close and his heart started to pound rapidly. Ron was here. His brother had come to see him. He had prevented the Headmaster from moving him elsewhere. He smirked internally as he wondered what the Dumbledore thought of the contract that he had unknowingly signed. I bet it pissed him off to realize that he would have no say in what happens to me.

He heard Ron sigh and leaned back on the bed. "Hey, mate. I heard you were catatonic. Madame Pomfrey doesn't know if you'll ever come out of it or not. I know you probably can't hear me, but that's all right. I need to say this to you regardless. I'm sorry I failed you in the end. I stood with you, as I should have, until the trial. When you confessed that you killed Ginny and the others under Veritaserum, my heart broke. I couldn't believe it. I still had doubts about it for so long, but I let myself be swayed by my former family. Yeah, that's right, my former family. I have decided to go through the Ritus Emancipo. Since you didn't grow up in the Wizarding World, you may not know what that means, but it's the Rite of Emancipation. I've decided to leave my family and the family name behind. I'll no longer be a Weasley. In fact, I'll have no last name unless someone gives me one. I waited for you because I wanted you to be there. Even if you are catatonic," Ron explained. Harry heard Ron take a shuddery breath before letting it out again.

"Harry, I'm so sorry. Please wake up so I can let you know. You're my brother and my best friend. I've missed you so much. The guilt I feel is killing me," Ron said brokenly.

Ron began to sob softly and Harry could no longer stay still. He opened his eyes and looked at his friend. Ron's hair was long and still

the bright red it had always been. It touched his shoulders and he looked as if he grew several more inches since Harry last saw him. He looked skinny, as if he hadn't been eating enough, which was strange when it came to Ron. Harry couldn't see Ron's face because his hands were covering it. Harry lifted his hand and Ron's hands away from his face. There were dark circle under his eyes, which were red from crying. He looked pale and his freckles stood out.

Ron looked at him, his expression shocked. Harry saw the surprise and hope shining from his brown eyes. "Harry?" he whispered.

"Hey, Ron," he said with a gentle smile directed at his friend.

"Bloody Hell!" Ron exclaimed, and then grinned widely. He reached forward and grabbed Harry in a hug. Harry leaned against him and sighed contently. He had his friend back and no one was going to take him away again.

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CHAPTER THREE

"Then who is it?" Dumbledore asked angrily.

Ron smirked at the Headmaster. "Me," he replied cheerfully.

The room erupted into chaos and Ron sat back in his chair, grinning with satisfaction. I'll have to remember to show this to Harry when he gets here. He'll love it. I wonder if he still has the pensieve he bought before he was imprisoned, he thought idly.

"What do you mean you're the caretaker? You're just a child yourself," Molly screeched.

Ron glared at her and sneered. "You keep telling yourself that woman."

The redhead looked over at Dumbledore and noticed the displeased look on his face. He mentally snickered, knowing that the Headmaster was not a happy person right now.

"Mr. Weasley..." Dumbledore started.

Ron gave him an icy glare and spat out venomously, "If you want me to continue with this conversation, you will not address me by that name. If you continue to do so I will ignore you and anything you have to say."

Dumbledore nodded slightly, not looking particular happy by the request. "Ron, if I understand you correctly, Harry made you his caretaker when he was sixteen?" he inquired.

"Actually, I believe he was fifteen at the time," Ron answered with a small grin.

"Fifteen?" Molly cried out, her expression showing her disbelief.

Dumbledore gave Molly a look and she quieted down with a grumble. He looked back at Ron and continued with the questions. "Fifteen

then. Don't you think that things may have changed since then? He is older now and..."

Ron interrupted Dumbledore before he could continue. "Actually, yes, things have changed, haven't they? At fifteen, Harry wasn't betrayed, belittled, or thrown into Azkaban by the people in this very room. When he was fifteen he actually cared about what you would've had to say about this. Now, I'm sure he isn't going to give a damn."

Dumbledore sighed deeply and looked at Ron kindly. "Surely you understand that I have his best interest at heart. I only want to protect him from Voldemort," he informed Ron gently.

Ron shook his head. "No, you don't. You want to have control over him. You only consider him your weapon. You think that this is going to be the perfect opportunity to mould him into someone you can control. I'm sure that his state of mind isn't going to be very good after eighteen months in Azkaban. You want to take that time to make Harry believe that you regret not helping him when he begged and pleaded for your help. You want to try to brainwash him while you have the chance. I'm not going to let you, Dumbledore. Nothing you do is in Harry's best interest, only yours," he said adamantly.

"It's funny; I used to think that Harry was kidding when he said that you were a kinder, gentler version of You Know Who," Ron paused as he saw Dumbledore's shocked and slightly angry expression. "I just thought it was because Harry was angry with you for Sirius's death, but now I'm beginning to understand what he meant. You hide behind your so-called kindness and wisdom while you sacrifice your pawns to the war with You Know Who. I will not allow you to use Harry as a pawn, nor will I allow you to use me as one either."

Ron stood up and looked at the angry Headmaster. "I'm going back to the Burrow to get what things my family hasn't destroyed and to run a couple of errands. I would like to have the paperwork started on the Emancipation Rite. The sooner I'm rid of the Weasley, name the better." He ignored the cries from his former family. "I would also like Harry to have a comfortable room, but if you decide that you can't have Harry here because you can't control him then I'll take him elsewhere," he informed him coldly.

The redhead headed for the fireplace, paused, and turned to look at the Headmaster. "Remember Dumbledore, you need Harry, but Harry doesn't need you. I know all about the prophecy and personally, I think it's a bunch of bullshit. I find it interesting that the prophecy came to light just about the time you began to lose control over Harry. How convenient," he mused thoughtfully. Ron shot a look at the Headmaster and noticed the man seemed to squirm in his seat. He snorted, turned back to fireplace and flooed to the Burrow.

The room was quiet after Ron left. Soon a chuckle was heard throughout the room and people glanced around before noticing that Severus Snape was the one laughing. He continued to chuckle for a few more seconds before he noticed that he was being stared at. He sneered at everyone and some turned away while others just glared at him.

"What is it that you find so amusing, Severus?" Dumbledore inquired stonily. Things had not gone as planned for Dumbledore, and now he wasn't for sure what to do. If he did anything major he would lose his magic. He would have to think on this. He wasn't done with Harry yet.

"I never thought I would say this, but I think I'm beginning to like this new Mr. Weasley, oh excuse me, Ron," Snape replied with relish, enjoying the looks of pain and shame on the other Weasleys' faces. "And with Potter deceiving you like he did, why that was positively Slytherin. I think I shall enjoy getting to know Mr. Potter again," the Potions Master said while smirking at the outraged Gryffindors in the room.

"You hate Harry. What makes you think that he'll respond to you any better than any one of us. We were his friends and Harry is very big on friendship," Hermione said pompously.

"If you call what you did to him friendship, then I have no need of it. While I may dislike Mr. Potter, I don't hate him. I have tried my best to help him in any way I can, though he may not have liked the measures I used to do so. If you will remember, I told you once before that Mr. Potter was not the type of person to kill someone. You chose to disregard it and I never brought it up again. I told Mr. Potter

myself that I didn't believe him capable of murder. It's true that he broke the rules and got away with many things that he should've been punished for, but he was never a murderer. I shall be interested in what Mr. Potter has to say about his supposed friends and family. It should be entertaining at the least." Snape stood up and sneered at the people in the room. His eyes stopped on the teary-eyed Lupin and Snape sneered at him hatefully.

"I will be in my quarters. I have some potions to brew to help with Mr. Potter's condition. I'm sure he'll be very malnourished and weak. He's probably even insane, so he'll need all the help he can get. Good day, Headmaster," Snape said with a nod. He turned and walked out the room leaving behind a room filled with quiet weeping.

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Ron flooded into the Burrow and walked up the stairs to his room. He grabbed the trunk that he had yet to unpack from his return from Hogwarts. He grabbed various articles of clothing and threw them into the trunk. He walked over to the closet and took out his wand, muttering a spell. A small box appeared and Ron grabbed it before backing out of the closet.

He walked over to the bed, sat down, and opened the box. He reached in and pulled out some pictures. They showed Harry and Ron in various poses during their time together at Hogwarts. Ron had made sure to hide the box when it became apparent that his family had no problems destroying his property. He didn't want to lose the pictures. At the time, they were all he had left of Harry, and no matter what he had felt after the trial, Harry had still been a big part of his life. He was glad that he'd kept the pictures.

Moving the pictures aside, he picked up a small key and a rolled up parchment. He looked at them thoughtfully, and with a smile, he placed them on the bed next to the trunk. He put the pictures back into the box and closed it. He placed the box gently into the trunk. He placed the key and parchment into the pocket of his robe.

He walked around the room, gathering what was left of his things; a book, a poster of a Quidditch player, and various knick-knacks that he

had collected over the years. He placed them in the trunk and slammed it closed. The sound echoed throughout the room. He took out his wand and cast a shrinking spell on the trunk, putting it in his pocket and with a final glance around the room; he walked out of the place that had been his for the last eighteen years. He walked down the stairs and out the door.

He walked a little ways, stopped and looked back at the house that had been his home all of his life. He remembered the good times with his family, the jokes that the twins would play on them, the games of Quidditch that the boys would play in the yard. He remembered when Ginny had finally gotten old enough to play with them; her laughter had been bright and cheerful. Sadly, none of those good memories could replace the bad memories he had. The bitterness he felt welled up inside him and tears came to his eyes. The pain he had held onto for the last nineteen months was trying to find a release.

He turned away from the house and took a deep breath. "Ron! Wait!" a voice called out to him. Ron froze, his eye narrowed in anger. He had a feeling he should've left before his family got back, but he had been too busy reminiscing to leave.

He turned and found Charlie rushing up to him. "What?" Ron demanded impatiently. "I have things to do, and I don't want to hear anything you have to say."

Charlie finally reached him and stopped in front of him. He placed a hand on Ron's shoulder only to have it shrugged off. He blew out a breath of exasperation. "Look, I know you're angry with the family, but is that really a reason to go through with the Rite? Hell, I get mad at mum all the time, but I'm not ready to leave the family because of it. Why don't you sit down and talk with the family and we can get it worked out," Charlie suggested.

Ron glared at Charlie. "I have every reason to go through with the Rite. I no longer want to be part of this family. I've been thinking about this for months, and now that Harry is going to be released from Azkaban, I realized that it was time. I've had enough. I've had to deal with months of remarks, threats, beatings, and my property being destroyed. I was either being belittled or ignored. I am tired of it.

This is not how family is supposed to work. Just because I held on to my belief in my friend does not give the Weasleys the right to treat me as if I'm the criminal. A Death Eater would've been treated better. Hell, Snape is treated better by the Weasleys than I am. I will no longer tolerate it. I'm sick and tired of feeling useless, betrayed, and unloved. Your family is supposed to love you unconditionally, but apparently the Weasleys don't see it that way," Ron spat out angrily.

"Ron, I still think we can work it out. There are many things to apologize for and we will, to both you and Harry," Charlie said kindly.

"That's just it, Charlie. Harry will not want your apology either. Why is it my family suddenly loves me now that they know Harry is innocent? They've suddenly decided that I was right in my defense of him. Why? Are they afraid that they will lose the standing they once had of being the Boy Who Lived adopted family? They can be damn sure they will. Harry and I want nothing to do with the Weasleys."

Charlie shook his head angrily. "You're talking about Harry as if you know what he wants. How do you know that he'll ignore us? How do you know that he wants nothing to do with us?" Charlie questioned.

"Simple, I didn't betray him. I didn't turn my back on him. The one thing that Harry relies on the most is trust. He had trust in the Weasleys to be by his side, to follow him, to believe in him and to love him like the son and brother that they always claimed he was. When they had the chance to show Harry that his trust in the Weasleys hadn't been misplaced, they failed. Harry has been my best friend for seven years, Charlie. I know how he thinks and how he reacts to things, so trust me when I say that the Weasleys will no longer be a part of Harry's life. They have no one to blame but themselves," Ron said wearily. He turned away from Charlie and began to walk away.

Charlie grabbed his arm to stop him. "Ron, I'm your brother and I..."

Ron turned and grabbed the hand and flung it off his arm. He looked at Charlie and sneered. "Not for long," he stated coldly. Ron stepped back and disappeared, leaving behind a shocked and saddened man.

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Ron reappeared in Diagon Alley, next to the twins shop. He snorted, annoyed, and began the walk to Gringotts. He reached the bank, walking up the stairs and stepped through the first set of doors. Once he entered the building, he nodded to the goblin guards and walked through the second set of doors.

He walked over to goblin at the counter. "I would like to speak to Ghistpok, please," Ron requested politely.

The goblin looked at him a few seconds then snorted. "Just a moment," he said rudely before walking away. A few minutes later, he reappeared with another goblin following behind him. The second goblin approached Ron and looked him over intently.

"I am Ghistpok. How can I help you?" the goblin asked.

"I have a parchment that I need to show you. I also would like to visit my vault," Ron explained.

The goblin nodded his head. "Very well, follow me please." Ghistpok turned and walked back the way he came with Ron following him. They entered a small office off the right of the large room. Ron sat down while Ghistpok closed the door and cast a silencing spell to keep out eavesdroppers.

Ghistpok took a seat behind the desk. "Now, what is it that you need to show me?" he inquired.

Ron took the parchment out of his pocket and handed it over to Ghistpok. The goblin took the parchment, untied the ribbon, and unrolled it. He began to read, humming a few times as he read. He finally finished and put the parchment down on the desk, looking at Ron with a curious expression. "Interesting," he said mildly.

"I'm not sure if you have heard or not, but Harry Potter was found innocent and is being released from Azkaban as we speak. It's doubtful that he'll be in the state of mind to take care of things. That parchment gives me the right as caretaker of Harry Potter to make changes within his accounts. I wish to look them over and see if

anything is amiss. I know that the accounts were frozen after he was thrown into Azkaban, but I need to make sure everything is as it should be. I don't want certain people to get control of anything that belongs to Harry," Ron said firmly.

Ghistpok gave Ron an unreadable look. "Harry Potter's accounts were not frozen," he informed the redhead abruptly.

Ron's eyes widened with surprise and he asked, "Why not? I thought all criminals had their accounts frozen."

"Usually that is true, but Harry Potter's accounts were not frozen by a decree from the Ministry," Ghistpok explained.

"Who signed the decree?" Ron asked, confused.

"Minister Fudge," the goblin replied with a grimace.

Ron wondered what was going on. He didn't like the thoughts going through his head. Why would the Ministry leave Harry's account open? He looked at the goblin before him and with a firm look said, "I would still like to see Harry's accounts."

"I will need a drop of blood to confirm that you are who you say you are," Ghistpok informed him.

"I'm going to go through with the Ritus Emancipo in a few days! I don't know what my new last name is as of yet. Will that cause a problem?" the redhead asked anxiously.

"No, it shouldn't. It is not the name in itself that matters, but the blood. It sees through any glamours or rituals and shows me the person within. You will no longer be a Weasley by name or magic, but you are by blood and that is all that matters," Ghistpok explained.

Ron nodded in understanding and held his hand out to the goblin. Ghistpok took a small knife and cut the tip of Ron's finger. He held the finger over the parchment, allowing a small drop of blood to fall. When the blood hit the parchment, Ghistpok muttered a spell and the name Ronald Bilius Weasley appeared in red. Ghistpok grunted with

satisfaction, and with a small flick of his finger, he healed the cut on Ron's finger.

Ghistpok opened the drawer of the desk and rummaged around. He pulled out several pieces of parchment that had been banded together. He handed the parchments over to Ron. "This is the summary of Harry Potter's accounts. It will let you know how much he has, what property he owns, where the money is going and what charities he donates to. Some of them were set up by Mr. Potter, and some were set up by his parents."

Ron nodded in understanding. "Who had control of Harry's accounts before me?"

"Albus Dumbledore," the goblin grunted.

Ron's expression darkened with anger. "Interesting," he muttered. He opened the parchments and began to read. His eyes widened in shock when he saw how much money was in the vaults. Merlin, Harry said he was well off, but I never thought he was filthy rich. He glanced over the properties and shook his head in disbelief. What could one possibly need with all these properties? Harry has a penthouse in New York, a horse ranch in Wyoming, a villa in France, a home in Germany and a freaking castle in Ireland, he thought in shock.

Ron shook his head with disbelief. He read further down the parchment and stopped at an entry. He read it twice, his eyes narrowed in anger. He looked at Ghistpok and asked, "Why is Dumbledore getting money from Harry's account?"

Ghistpok shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Dumbledore himself set it up that way. What he uses the money for I am not sure, but he has been drawing money from Potter's account since a year after Voldemort was destroyed the first time around."

Ron hissed with anger. He now knew why Harry's accounts remained opened. Dumbledore probably influenced Fudge to keep them open. He wondered if one of the accounts went to Fudge. He would have to find out later. "I want that account closed. In fact, I want all accounts that have anything to do with Dumbledore, the Order of Phoenix, or Hogwarts closed. All other accounts that were not set up by Harry or

any other members of his family are to be put on hold. I'll look these parchments over later to figure out which ones are to stay open."

Ghistpok nodded his head in understanding. He grabbed a couple of pieces of parchment and began to write while Ron continued to read. After a few minutes, he looked up and addressed the goblin. "Leave the account to Remus Lupin open. Harry may not like him right now, but the man has no other means of income, and even I wouldn't begrudge him what he has now. In fact, I want you to increase the account another 300 galleons a week. This way he'll be able to afford the Wolfsbane potion," Ron said thoughtfully. If Harry decided he didn't like it, he could always change it, but Ron doubted that he would. He couldn't help but feel sorry for the man. He lost all his friends, had no job, and had the curse of being a werewolf.

He put the parchment down on the desk, picked up the other parchment and began to read. It was a summary of the inheritance that Harry had gotten from Sirius. He read it over and again found some unexplained accounts. "I want anything that has anything to do with Dumbledore, the Order of Phoenix, and Hogwarts closed. Anything else that has nothing to do with Harry Potter I want a hold on it. When did the accounts for Dumbledore open?" Ron asked curiously.

Ghistpok glanced at a piece of paper that was on his desk. "About a month after Sirius Black was found innocent and the accounts were released."

Ron growled in anger. That had been six months after Sirius Black died. Peter Pettigrew had been caught and questioned before escaping from the Ministry. When it had become known that Sirius Black hadn't been the Potter's secret keeper, and that he hadn't killed Pettigrew or the Muggles, he had been found innocent posthumously. That had been a couple months before the murders. Harry had been relieved, but saddened by the fact that Sirius wasn't alive to enjoy his freedom.

Ron was angered by the audacity of the Headmaster. How dare that man take money that doesn't belong to him! he fumed. If he thinks he's going to get another galleon from Harry, he has another thing

coming. No wonder the man wanted control of Harry. He didn't want his money taken away from him. Well, that was too damn bad.

After he read the parchment, Ron sat it down on the desk and glanced at Ghispok. "When will the accounts be closed or placed on hold?" he inquired.

"They are being closed as we speak. Whomever the accounts were set up for shall be informed of the situation. A letter will be sent by owl. If they have questions, shall I have them directed to you?" Ghispok asked.

"Yes, I would like to know who is getting money they shouldn't have been getting," Ron replied.

"Understood. Is there anything else I can do for you?" Ghispok inquired.

"Yes, I need to visit my vault."

"Of course, sir. Biletooth!" the goblin called out after taking off the silencing spell.

A goblin came through the door. "Yes, sir?"

"Show this man to his vault please," Ghispok requested politely.

Biletooth nodded his head and directed Ron towards the door. Ron got up from the chair, thanked Ghispok, and walked out the door with Biletooth. Together they walked in silence as they went down the stairs to the cavern and into a cart.

"Vault number please," Biletooth requested.

"Vault 890," Ron told him.

The cart took off and Ron closed his eyes, trying to calm his queasy stomach. He hated riding in the carts. He wished the goblins would find another way to get to the vaults. After a few minutes, the cart

stopped and Ron stepped out, swaying slightly. "Bloody hell, "he whispered.

Biletooth walked to the vault and held out his hand. "Key, please." Ron took the key out of his pocket and handed it to the goblin. He watched as the goblin inserted the key into the lock and the door opened. He nodded to the goblin and entered the vault. He walked over to the pedestal that sat in the middle of the vault, where he picked up the book and a long, thin box that was laying on it. He pocketed the box and shrunk the book, which he then placed in his pocket. With a sigh of satisfaction, he turned and walked out of the vault. He waited impatiently while Biletooth closed the door and locked it. He grabbed the key that Biletooth held out to him and walked over to the cart, waiting for the goblin.

The ride back was just as harrowing as the previous one. Ron got out of the cart and swayed again. "Oh, I'm going to be sick. Why can't you find another mode of transportation?" he moaned loudly.

Biletooth snorted, muttering "Weak humans" under his breath and proceeded to walk up the stairs. Ron followed slowly trying to reorient himself. He shook off the dizziness and walked up the stairs. With a muttered 'thank you' to Biletooth, Ron walked out of Gringotts. He walked to the bottom of the steps and disappeared.

He appeared in Hogsmeade and headed towards Honeydukes. With Harry being in Azkaban for eighteen months, he would be having a serious craving for Chocolate Frogs. Right now, Harry could use what little happiness he could get. He walked into the shop and grabbed some Chocolate Frogs, a box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, and some Licorice Wands. He walked up to the counter and paid for the candy. He walked out of the shop, munching on the beans.

He decided to take some time to enjoy the day. He began the walk to Hogwarts. He figured by the time he got there Harry should've been brought to the school and examined. "I hope he's alright," he muttered. He glanced around and admired the flowers that grew wildly around the countryside. He hummed to himself as he walked, taking it slow and easy. He wondered what Harry was going to say when he told him about Dumbledore and the money. He stopped in

the middle of the road, his mind racing furiously. Dumbledore had said that Grimmauld place was closed along with Harry's accounts. That's why the meetings for the Order were taking place at Hogwarts. That bastard lied, Ron thought with anger. Dumbledore needed everyone to believe that Harry's accounts were frozen. Ron growled in anger and began to walk once more. That bastard will pay, he thought angrily, but not until I know Harry's all right.

An hour later, he finally reached Hogwarts and passed through the gates. He walked up the pathway to the school, opened the large doors, and walked into the school. He noticed that there were students milling around the hallways, whispering furiously. Some of them looked at Ron curiously, and some with shame. Ron snorted as he realized that they must've heard about Harry's innocence. Yeah, it looks like I was right, he sneered. He glared at a couple of seventh year Gryffindors and began to walk towards the infirmary.

"Ron, wait!" a voice called out. Ron sighed deeply and muttered to himself, "Now what?" He turned around to yell at whoever was calling for him. He wasn't in the mood for apologies. He snorted. As if anyone would actually apologize for how they treated him or Harry.

Dennis Creevey rushed up to him, panting slightly. "Is it true?" he asked in a rush. "Is Harry Potter really innocent of my brother's death?" he questioned desperately. Ron gave the boy a curt nod and watched as the boy's eyes closed in denial. "Oh, Merlin," he whispered. "Oh, Harry." A tear rolled out from underneath his closed eyes and the boy took a couple of quivering breaths. He opened them and glared at Ron fiercely. "Who? Who killed my brother then?" he growled.

Ron looked at Dennis with a slightly sympathetic look. "Draco Malfoy," he informed him.

"That bastard," Dennis snarled before beginning to cry softly. "Harry's never going to forgive me," he whispered.

Ron looked at him and sighed. He grabbed the young man by the shoulder and shook it. "I'm sure Harry understands that you were grieving. You said some terrible things true, but that is all you did.

Harry will understand that and forgive you, Dennis. Colin was your brother and you two were very close."

Dennis shook his head. "Ginny was your sister, but you never gave up on Harry," he cried out.

"Yes, but I was also Harry's best friend and I knew him as a person. You didn't. You only regarded him as a hero, and you didn't know him well enough to know any different. It might have been different if you had turned on him like everyone else did, but you didn't. You ignored him and wouldn't even speak his name. That is called grief Dennis, and it's allowed," Ron said, shaking the man slightly.

Dennis sniffed and nodded his head. "Tell Harry that I'm sorry when you see him."

Ron arched an eyebrow. "What makes you think I'm going to see him?" he questioned.

"Why else would you be here? You graduated last year, remember? You're his best friend, his only friend now. Of course you're going to see him," he said wryly. Dennis patted Ron on the arm gently, turned, and walked away.

Ron shook his head, bemused, and continued his way up to the infirmary. When he reached the room, he walked in and looked around. Finding no one around, he went looking for Harry's bed. Except for a first year, they were all empty. I hope that means that Harry was already released.

"Mr. Weasley, what can I do for you?" a voice asked behind him.

Startled he jumped and turned around quickly, his wand out. Madame Pomfrey looked at him, the wand and gave him an arched look. Ron blushed sheepishly and put his wand away. "I was looking for Harry. Has he gotten here yet?" he asked eagerly.

Madame Pomfrey frowned at him slightly. "I don't believe I'm supposed to tell anyone about Harry, Dumbledore's orders."

Ron stood to his full height of 6'3" and looked down at Madame Pomfrey with an icy glare. "If this is about Harry then I have every right to know. I'm Harry's designated caretaker, and all things regarding Harry come to me. If Dumbledore tries to interfere, that manipulative bastard will be in breach of his contract and he will lose every ounce of his magic, or did he forget to tell you that little piece of tidbit. Now, I want to know where Harry is and I want to know what is wrong with him. If you refuse, I'll take it to the Ministry, and I'll have a couple of Aurors here so fast your head will spin. In regards to Harry's health and treatment, I don't want you giving out any information unless I approve it first. Not to anyone, not even Dumbledore. If you don't think you can comply then I'll take Harry else where to get the kind of care he needs," Ron said coldly.

The woman stared at Ron in shock then began to bluster. "Well, I never..." she trailed off in disbelief.

"And you never will again if I don't get a Wizard's oath. Now!" the redhead growled.

"I swear by a Wizard's oath that I will not give out any information regarding Harry Potter to anyone, including the Headmaster, unless given permission by you," she declared and they both felt the magic as the oath took hold.

"How is Harry?" Ron asked gently, his former anger gone.

Poppy glared at him. "He is weak and malnourished. I gave him several potions to help with his condition. After some rest and some food, he will be better physically. Mentally however, Harry Potter appears to be catatonic. He's not aware of anything going on around him. He can follow basic commands like sit, stand, and eat, but his mind has retreated too far into himself," she explained.

Ron was disturbed and saddened by the news, but not surprised. Azkaban is not a place of joy and when your deepest, darkest memories are played over in your mind repeatedly, it's bound to make one insane.

"Will he get better?" he asked the nurse.

Madame Pomfrey frowned slightly, her expression concerned. "I'm not sure. He could get better as soon as his mind comprehends that he is safe now, or he could never get better. I'm not for sure which way it'll go. If you notice a difference, then you must let me know. He needs to be watched carefully," she warned.

Ron nodded his head in understanding. "Of course. Do you know where he's at?"

"Lupin and the Headmaster took him to his room, but I'm not for sure where it is. You shall have to ask him," Poppy informed him.

Ron gave her a nod of thanks and made his way out of the infirmary. He walked down a couple flights of stairs and headed towards the Headmaster's office. He had only walked a little ways when he saw Lupin.

"Lupin!" he called out and the man stopped and faced him. Ron walked up to the man. "Where's Harry? Madame Pomfrey said that you and the Headmaster took him to his room. Could you take me there?" he asked.

Lupin gazed at him with sad eyes and nodded his head. He turned and began to walk away. Ron followed him and they walked together in silence. "I went to Gringotts today to take care of Harry's finances. I closed all the accounts that didn't have anything to do with Harry," Ron said idly and watched Lupin's reaction from the corner of his eyes.

He saw Lupin pale in shock then resignation. He bowed his head and continued to walk. He had an air of defeat that Ron had never seen on the man before and he felt slightly guilty for the callous way he had made the remark. He sighed softly and muttered softly, "All of them except yours. I added another 300 galleons a week to your account."

Lupin whipped his head up, his expression shocked. "Why?" he croaked.

"Harry would've wanted me to. You may have turned your back on him, but he would still want you taken care of. His parents gave you that money, and I'm not about to take it away. The extra money is so that you can afford the Wolfsbane potion. You need it and I'm not about to take that away from you, no matter how I feel about you right now."

Lupin looked at Ron with a grateful expression. "Thank you," he said softly.

They stopped in front of a painting of a milkmaid. "Whatever," Ron replied with a shrug.

"Forgiveness," Lupin told the painting and it opened. Ron snorted; the password will have to be changed as soon as Lupin leaves.

"Thanks," Ron said.

Lupin nodded, turned, and walked away. Ron stared after the defeated man in pity and anger. It was hard to hate a man that looked that defeated, but he still turned on Harry just like everyone else. He glanced at the picture. "I'm the caretaker of the man in this room and I would like to have the password changed."

The milkmaid giggled cutely and replied, "Of course, Master Wizard. What would you like to change it to?"

Ron smirked at the portrait. "Betrayal," he said and the milkmaid frowned slightly, but nodded her head. Ron gave a grunt of satisfaction and entered the room. He looked around the luxurious room and shook his head.

"Wheezy!" a voice cried out.

He turned and looked as Dobby came running into the room excitedly. Ron smiled at the house-elf. "Hello, Dobby. What are you doing here?"

Dobby bounced on his feet, excitement and happiness shining on his face. The house-elf had been a staunch supporter of Harry, believing

in his innocence. He had been devastated when Harry was sent to Azkaban and vowed to take care of Harry's Wheezy. While Ron was still at Hogwarts, Dobby took care of him when the redhead decided that he didn't want to eat with the rest of the students. Ron considered the little house-elf a friend.

"Taking care of Harry Potter, sir. Wheezy's mum wanted to take care of him, but Dobby said no. Dobby will take care of Harry Potter and no one else. Wheezy's mum was not happy and began to yell at Dobby. Dobby is a free elf now thanks to Harry Potter and Dobby did not like Wheezy's mum yelling at him. Therefore, Dobby silenced Wheezy's mum with elf magic. Now Wheezy's mum cannot yell at Dobby anymore," the house-elf said slyly.

Ron began laugh and he patted Dobby on the shoulder. "Good job, Dobby." Dobby beamed up at Ron. "How is Harry?"

"Sleeping. Dobby fed Harry Potter then Harry Potter went to sleep. Dobby was about to leave to go back to kitchen. Does Wheezy need anything?" the house-elf asked joyfully.

"Actually, I would like some food if you don't mind. I'm quite hungry."

"Of course, Wheezy." The house-elf disappeared and Ron walked towards the bedroom. He glanced at the bed and he stopped breathing for a second. Harry was lying sprawled out on the bed. He looked thin and pale. His hair was coarse and brittle from the lack of good food, and it was long and unkempt. He was frowning in his sleep and he whimpered once before quieting. His face was pale and gaunt and there were dark circles underneath his eyes.

Ron walked over to the bed and sat down. He stared at his best friend with tears in his eyes. The guilt was eating him alive and he couldn't seem to swallow the lump that had formed in his throat. He took a shuddering breath and patted Harry on the arm gently.

Dobby appeared in the other room and with another look at Harry, Ron walked out of the bedroom. He sat down at the small table where Dobby had placed the food. Thanking the house-elf, he began to eat. For the first time in many months, he was hungry and he devoured

his food. After taking a sip of juice, he sighed with satisfaction. He leaned back in the chair and stared around the room. He grinned; it figured Harry would get a very nice room. Dumbledore is probably trying to bribe Harry. Of course, it would only make a difference if he were actually aware of his surroundings.

There was a knock on the door and Ron stood up to answer it. He opened the door and found a disgruntled Headmaster standing there. He didn't look happy to see Ron, but quickly covered his expression of displeasure.

"The portrait told me that password had been change. Was that your doing?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

"Yep, the other one was a stupid ploy on your part. I changed it as soon as I could," Ron replied mockingly.

"What is the new one?" the Headmaster inquired.

Ron sneered at the old wizard. "I'm not telling you. I'm sure you'll figure it out later, but until then you'll just have to knock like everyone else." He turned away from the doorway and let the Headmaster in.

He turned to face the Headmaster, but he was distracted by a moan coming from the bedroom. He ran into the bedroom and sat on the bed, gently patting his friend on the back. He ran his hand down Harry's back soothingly and muttered nonsensical words. Harry calmed down and the moaning stopped. He lay there, sleeping quietly.

Ron turned towards the door and noticed that the Headmaster had followed him into the bedroom. "What do you want?"

"I was wondering if maybe I could take Harry somewhere safe," Dumbledore requested.

"Are you trying to say that Hogwarts isn't safe?" Ron asked with a frown.

"No, I was just wondering if maybe I can take him to my home. It is unplotable and it's safe behind many wards. Harry would be safe,"

the Headmaster explained. "With you soon to be distracted by the Rite, you wouldn't have to worry about his care."

Ron sneered at the Headmaster. "No, I don't think so. Where Harry goes I go. I'm not leaving him to your tender mercies," he snapped.

"But I assure you, he would be safe," Dumbledore said gently.

"I said no," Ron said coldly.

"I seriously think..."

"I don't care what you think. I'm his caretaker and if you have something to say, then say it. I don't give you permission to move him, Dumbledore. You know as well as I do what will happen if you try to gainsay me. Go ahead. Hell, try it. I want you to. I would love to see your magic dissolve and the whole Wizarding World panic because you were stupid enough to try and do something you were not supposed to," Ron said snidely.

Dumbledore sighed heavily and looked at Ron with a benevolent expression. "Mr. Weasley..." he began.

"Don't call me that," Ron hissed venomously.

"Ron, he will be safe where I take him," Dumbledore said gently.

"I said no, Headmaster. You were all for letting him stay here when you thought you had control of him, but now that you don't, you're trying to remove him from Hogwarts and away from me. I'm letting you know now that you can't move him without my expressed permission, nor may you have anyone else move him. If that happens, then it'll be a breach of contract and you'll lose your magic. I don't give a damn if you like it or not. You'll just have to deal with it. Now, leave this room before you wake him," Ron demanded coldly.

There was a moment of silence before Dumbledore sighed, exasperated. "Very well, Ron. You do know that he's catatonic, don't you? He's not aware of you, or anything else for that matter," Dumbledore explained.

"I don't care. I need to make my apologies to him in private. Please leave," Ron said firmly.

There was a moment of silence then Dumbledore hissed with exasperation. "Very well, Ron. You know as well as I do that he's catatonic. He's not aware of you, or anything else for that matter," Dumbledore said.

"I don't care. I need to make my apologies to him in private. Please leave," Ron said firmly.

Ron watched as the Headmaster left the bedroom then the suite. He ran his hands over his face wearily when he heard the door close. He was so very tired of everything. He sat down on the bed, sighed, and then leaned back. He glanced at Harry and began to talk.

"Hey, mate. I heard you were catatonic. Madame Pomfrey doesn't know if you'll ever come out of it or not. I know you probably can't hear me, but that's all right. I need to say this to you regardless. I'm sorry I failed you in the end. I stood with you, as I should have, until the trial. When you confessed that you killed Ginny and the others under Veritaserum, my heart broke. I couldn't believe it. I still had doubts about it for so long, but I let myself be swayed by my former family. Yeah, that's right, my former family. I have decided to go through the Ritus Emancipo. Since you didn't grow up in the Wizarding World, you may not know what that means, but it's the Rite of Emancipation. I've decided to leave my family and the family name behind. I'll no longer be a Weasley. In fact, I'll have no last name unless someone gives me one. I waited for you because I wanted you to be there. Even if you are catatonic," Ron explained.

"Harry, I'm so sorry. Please wake up so I can let you know. You're my brother and my best friend. I've missed you so much. The guilt I feel is killing me," Ron said brokenly.

The redhead covered his face with his hand and began to sob softly, the guilt and pain eating him up. Harry was here, but he couldn't hear him because he was catatonic. He had sobbed for several minutes

when he felt hands pulling his hand away from his face. Startled he looked straight into blazing green eyes.

He caught his breath, hope filling him, not daring to believe when he was seeing. "Harry?" he whispered softly.

"Hey, Ron," Harry replied with a gentle smile directed towards Ron.

Ron stared at Harry for a few seconds in disbelief then exclaimed, "Bloody Hell" while grinning widely. He reached forward and grabbed Harry in a hug. His friend was awake and aware. He heard Harry sigh in contentment and he smiled softly. They were together again, and no matter what Ron would be there for Harry. He would not lose faith in him again. He laid his head on top of Harry's and smiled.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Ron pulled away from Harry and looked at him with amazement and suspicion. "I thought you were catatonic. How come you aren't out of your mind?"

Harry looked at his friend, amusement shining from his eyes. "You sound like you're disappointed that I'm not. I can try and go crazy if you want me to," he said with a grin.

Ron stared at him for a second then smirked. "Harry, mate, you're already crazy."

Harry laughed aloud and squeezed his friend's arm, joy filling him at having his friend back. "I didn't know what was going on. I was in my cell when I heard footsteps. I thought it was the guards coming to take potshots at the Traitor of the Wizarding World," he said bitterly. "I blanked out and waited for them. Imagine my surprise when I saw Percy come into my cell, talking to me as if he cared." Harry looked a little bewildered by that.

Ron looked at Harry sharply. "Percy? Huh...who would've believed it? Then again, I haven't seen the bloke since your trial. I might have to change that," he replied idly.

Harry glanced at Ron, his expression surprised. "I thought you didn't like your brother."

Ron waved his hand in dismissal. "A lot of things have changed since you were convicted. I'll get to them later, but right now, I want to know more about your condition."

Harry nodded in understanding. "After I realized that it was Percy, I got very confused. When he told the guards to help me, I was even more baffled. I decided to keep pretending I was catatonic until I knew what was going on. I was portkeyed to the Infirmary, where I proceeded to pass out. When I awoke and realized I was at Hogwarts, I got concerned. I figured they were moving me to a "safer" location, but I wasn't for sure. I continued my deception when I heard the old fool and the werewolf come into the room. Madame Pomfrey

discussed my "condition" with them and I decided that I would keep the deception going until I felt knew what was going on. They brought me to this room and left Dobby in charge of my care," he explained.

"I continued with my deception, but somehow Dobby could see through it. He was very happy to know that I was all right, well as all right as I could be with eighteen months in Azkaban. He fed me and I fell asleep. I awoke to hear you and the old man talking. I had planned on staying catatonic until I heard you talking. I couldn't let you think that I hated you for what you assumed was your betrayal. I decided that I needed my friend more than I needed the deception," Harry informed him.

Ron gripped Harry's arm, his face shining with gratitude. "Thanks, mate."

Harry smiled at him. "Now that you know I'm not catatonic, maybe you can tell me what the hell is going on. I heard Percy say something about a pardon," he inquired, his face baffled.

Ron sighed. "The Malfoys were captured. When questioned, they told the Aurors that you were framed for the deaths of Ginny, Cho, and Colin. Draco Malfoy is the one who killed them. Lucius Malfoy helped Voldemort at your trial. He was there under a polyjuice potion and he was the one to cast the spell to help you become more receptive to Voldemort's control. When all this came out, your pardon was granted and you were released from Azkaban. Merlin, Harry, I'm so sorry for doubting you in the end. I just didn't know what to think," he said with a guilty look.

Harry patted him on the arm, trying to comfort him. "Ron, you have nothing to feel guilty about. I understand why you never came to visit. I confessed under Veritaserum and you had no way of knowing that I was manipulated into doing so. I forgave you the instant Voldemort took over my mind. You stayed by my side before the trial. You were the only one of the very few who even thought I hadn't done it. I don't think I've ever told you how grateful I was for your support," he said emotionally.

Ron tried to swallow the lump that had formed in his throat. "You're my best friend, my brother. I know you, Harry. I know the torture you went through when you had your visions. I know how you felt when Sirius died. There's just no way you could've killed anyone. There's no way in hell you would've killed anyone you thought of as family. Ginny was a sister to you and you loved her as such. Cho was someone you cared for as well. Colin was the annoying little brother who would constantly pester you but you cared for him as well. There was no way that you would've killed them. Anyone who knew you should've known that," the redhead exclaimed angrily.

Harry smiled sadly at Ron. "Maybe, but you know as well as I do that they didn't know me. They only thought of me as the Boy Who Lived, the one person who defeated Voldemort. At the first thought of me going dark, they turned on me. There were no explanations, no investigations, nothing. They didn't care. While I don't really care what the Wizarding World thought, the betrayal of my former friends is something I will never forgive. They should have known better, they should have known me better, Ron. Dumbledore did nothing, and I begged him for his help. I was a weapon Ron, and since he lost control of that weapon, he could've cared less what happened to me," he explained angrily.

"Let's not forget Hermione, shall we? She was the very first person to turn on me. There is nothing in this world, or the next, that will allow me to forgive her. Voldemort could be torturing her in front of me and I would just sit back and watch. She was supposed to be my friend. Why, Ron? Why did she turn on me?" Harry cried out, his face filled with pain and anger.

Ron grabbed Harry and hugged him close. He felt his friend trembling with emotions. He wished that there was something he could say to help Harry, but he knew that nothing would help ease the pain that his friend felt. The same pain that Ron himself felt to a lesser degree. They sat there together in silence as Ron waited for Harry to compose himself. After a few minutes, Harry pulled back and gave Ron a grateful look.

"You know, as I was coming to find you, Dennis Creevey stopped me," Ron commented softly.

Harry looked at him warily. "Oh? What did he have to say?"

"He wanted me to tell you that he was sorry for what he had said to you, for believing that you were capable of killing his brother."

Harry looked at him, an understanding look on his face. "Dennis was very close to Colin. I don't blame him for being angry. He was grieving and the things he said were not a surprise. Funny enough, he never hurt me. He didn't know me well enough to know any different. After the one time he yelled at me, he never said anything else to me. Not even at the trial," he sighed.

"I told him that you wouldn't have any hard feelings about it, but he wanted me to tell you, just in case," Ron explained.

"As I said before, it's not the Wizarding World opinion that hurt me, it was those that I had considered my friends and family. They are the ones who betrayed me without thought," Harry replied.

"What about Lupin?" Ron asked curiously.

Harry's gaze hardened and grew cold. "He should've known better. He already had one friend framed and sent to Azkaban. What makes him think this could have been any different? He should've thought of that first. But no, Merlin forbid he should go against anything Dumbledore says. I don't know if I'll ever forgive him for that, Ron," he answered bitterly.

Ron nodded his head in understanding. "And the Weasleys?" he sneered.

Harry looked at him curiously. "Ah, yes, the Weasleys. That reminds me, what exactly is the Emancipation Rite?" he asked. "You said earlier that you were going through with it."

"It's a ritual that happens when one wants to disown their family name. When I perform the ritual, I'll no longer be a Weasley by name or magic. I'll be giving up all that comes with being a Weasley, not that

there's anything worth being part of that family anymore," Ron bit out venomously.

Harry frowned before asking, "Ron, what happened? I figured that since I was in Azkaban, your family would treat you better."

Ron snorted angrily and glared. "Not hardly. You might've been in Azkaban, but I was also in a prison. I was going through hell, Harry. After you were convicted, my loving family decided that I hadn't paid enough for going against them. They proceeded to destroy my property, belittle and insult me wherever I went, or ignore me depending on their mood. The twins decided that I needed to be taught a lesson, so took me out one day and beat me."

Harry gasped with shock and Ron looked away, ashamed. "They sneered and jeered that I shouldn't have been allowed to live. I was seriously injured and they would've done more, but my Father had come out to see what all the noise was about. He looked at the twins and told them to leave. He looked at me in disappointment and helped me into the house where I was given very little care, only the very minimum that would keep me alive. Merlin knows, they couldn't let me die. Oh no! I had to live so that they could teach me the error of my ways," he said with such bitterness.

Harry gazed at him, horrified. "Merlin, no! Ron I...They...but...," he stuttered.

Ron smiled grimly. "Oh, yes. That was just the beginning. While I didn't have another beating as bad as that, I was pushed, tripped, and slapped whenever the mood struck them. Mum decided that I shouldn't eat as well as the rest of the family, so I was given bread, gruel and whatever nasty food my mother could think of. I lost weight, not that I ate much. I was underage so I couldn't leave my family home and once I could, I didn't have the money. The whole time they were doing this, they told me that they were showing me the error of my ways, that they were doing it out of love," he sneered, his face twisted with hate and pain.

"Merlin, Ron. I'm so sorry," Harry said with a guilty look on his face.

"Why?" the redhead asked, confused.

"If you hadn't supported me, you wouldn't have had to go through that. I can't believe that they would do that to you." Harry commented with a shake of his head.

"Why are you surprised? They turned on you easily enough, and they were supposed to be your adopted family. They considered you a member of the family, but they had no problems with betraying your trust and love. What does it matter that I was also betrayed. In some ways, it makes perfect sense," Ron muttered.

"I may have been like family, but I wasn't, Ron. Molly didn't give birth to me and I wasn't raised by them. I was never actually a Weasley. I would've thought they would've cared more for an actual member of the family," Harry sighed sadly.

Ron snorted, his face filled with disgust. "No, they didn't care that I was family. What they cared about was that I embarrassed the family. I went against the Wizarding World and supported you. I stayed by your side and publicly declared you innocent. That is the reason my family," he sneered, "treated me like they did. Now that you're out of Azkaban, I'm not leaving your side. You need me and I'll be there for you. It finally gave me the courage to do something I've been thinking about for months. I can't be a part of that family anymore. I don't want the Weasley name anymore. The very word brings to mind betrayal, pain, and rage. I don't want to be associated with it anymore," Ron said adamantly.

"What are you going to be called then?" Harry asked curiously.

Ron shrugged his shoulders. "Not sure. I'll think of something."

Harry thought a moment. "You know I would give you the Potter name if I could don't you?" he asked anxiously.

Ron grinned. "I know, but you can't. No one not of Potter blood, unless by marriage, shall be given the Potter name. I know that. I don't need your last name to be your brother, Harry," he replied softly.

"Maybe, but it would've been nice," Harry said wistfully.

Ron smiled at his best friend and answered, "Yeah, it would've."

Harry and Ron sat in companionable silence, each in their own thoughts. After a few minutes, Harry perked up. "I have an idea," he said slyly.

"Oh?" Ron asked, intrigued by the sly look on Harry's face.

"I'm the Head of the Potter family estate and the Black family estate. While I can't do anything about the Potter name, I can give you the Black family name. As the head of the Black family, I can do with it what I want. The family doesn't have the same conditions as the Potter's do, which is why I'm the head of the family. I can adopt into the family whoever I wish," Harry explained.

"As my first official act of the head of the Black family, I offer you the name of Ronald Bilius Black. As such, you will have a right to the family fortune and property," Harry said rather pompously, then grinned mischievously at Ron's stunned gaze.

Harry grinned softened into a smile. "Ron, seriously, I would like you to take the last name of Black. Sirius would've approved. Also, think of it this way, it'll piss off your mother," he teased with a mischievous grin. "Not to mention a few other people and quite a few purebloods."

Ron perked up at that. "I suppose it would at that. Thank you, Harry. I accept your gracious offer. I don't need the fortune, though. Just that fact that you offered the name is enough."

Harry shook his head. "No, Ron. What's mine is yours. I trust you with it. If I hadn't, I would've never made you my caretaker in case something happened to me. As a member of the Black family, you have every right to the money and properties the name offers. I'm not about to keep that from you," he exclaimed firmly.

Ron choked up and tears filled his eyes. "Damn, mate, you got me sniffing like a girl," he whined. "All right, if that's what you want, then I'll allow it." He watched as Harry beamed brightly. "I have a condition

too. Well, not really a condition, more like an idea. I've been thinking about it for years, but with all that's happened, I think it would be a good thing."

Harry looked at him curiously. "What is it?"

"I know we can't share the same last name and we're not brothers by blood, but I would like to perform the Cognatio Frater ritual," Ron mumbled shyly.

"What does that mean?" Harry asked.

"It means Blood Brother. With this ritual, we would be bound together by blood and magic as brothers. It would be a sharing of our blood and magic. I would get a bit of your blood and magic and you would get a bit of mine. If scanned by any medical or revealing spells, we would be recognized as being actual brothers. The bond would have to be recognized by the Wizarding World and can't be ignored. If we perform this ritual, then by all rights, we'll be brothers," Ron said softly, watching Harry closely.

Harry stared at Ron, his face filled with awe. "You want to do the ritual? I would finally have family?" he asked with a quiver in his voice. Ron nodded and Harry smiled brightly. "Yes! Let's do it."

"You sure, mate?" Ron asked seriously. "Once it's done, there's no going back. We will be brothers until we die. The ritual is very special and it's not performed a lot because a wizard doesn't like to share their magic. They don't usually have the trust that is needed for the ritual. It can be dangerous. If the wizards who perform the ritual do not trust each other explicitly then they can die."

"Ron, you know that I trust you with my life. I want to do this. I have no problems with sharing my magic with you. I trust you with it. I've always thought of you as my brother, and now I finally have a way to make that become true. I say we do it," Harry said excitedly.

Ron grinned at Harry's excitement. "All right. We'll have to do it away from Hogwarts. I don't want the old man interfering in the ritual. He

would try to stop it and I don't want that to happen. He is already unhappy about losing control over you," he sneered.

"How did the manipulative bastard act when he found out he had no control over me?" Harry asked gleefully.

Ron smirked. "He was quite livid. He didn't say anything per se, but the looks were enough to figure it out. He thought you had given control to Lupin, so he proceeded to try and persuade Lupin to his way of thinking. Once I let him know that I was in fact your caretaker, he was not happy. I believe he was going to contest it until I brought up the contract that he so foolishly signed," the redhead said with relish. "Oh, Harry, the look on his face was beautiful. I'll have to show it to you sometime."

Harry started to laugh. He always knew that the Headmaster would try to gain control over him somehow. He must've been angry to realize that a teenager had tricked him into signing the contract. Harry heaved a happy sigh at the thought of getting one over the all-knowing Dumbledore.

"Harry, I thought you should know that I went to Gringotts today. I checked over your finances. The Ministry never froze your accounts. The goblin in charge of your accounts told me that there had been a Ministry decree signed by Fudge, to leave your accounts open. I found several accounts that had been opened in the Potter and Black fortunes with Dumbledore's name on it. There were also several that had something to do with Hogwarts and the Order of Phoenix. There were other miscellaneous accounts that I knew nothing about so I had them frozen until they could be looked at. The accounts that included Dumbledore, Hogwarts, and the Order of Phoenix were closed. I didn't do much about them. I figured I could go over them later to see what the hell was going on. Apparently, Dumbledore himself opened these accounts. I think that is one of the reasons he was not happy about me becoming your caretaker. He should find out sometime tomorrow that the accounts are closed," Ron explained.

Harry looked livid. "That bastard has been stealing my money," he exclaimed angrily. "I assume I'm helping to support Hogwarts and the Order? Oh, hell no! This will be dealt with Ron, don't you worry."

Ron nodded. "I know, but my concern is what Dumbledore will try to do once he finds that the accounts have been closed. I don't think he thought I would check out your finances this soon. I have a feeling that he might try something to keep us here, even with the threat of the contract over his head. He has the ability to manipulate other people to do his job so that he doesn't get his hands dirty. We need to leave Hogwarts and we need to do it tonight when everyone else is asleep," the redhead said.

"All right, but where can we go that Dumbledore doesn't know about?" Harry asked anxiously.

Ron smirked. "Did you know that you have a castle in Ireland, some property in the US, Germany and France? Wherever we go, we can use the Fidelius spell to hide the home. As long as we're out from under Dumbledore's watchful eye, I don't care where we go. He can't do much if he doesn't know where we are. It's my right as your caretaker to take you wherever I feel you're the safest, and right now, Hogwarts isn't safe," Ron explained.

Harry nodded in agreement. "All right, I think I would like to see the castle in Ireland. We need a secret keeper. You would be the obvious choice, but it's a little too obvious. It needs to be someone that nobody would think of. Sadly, there isn't anyone I would trust with this information besides you." He glanced out of the bedroom door and looked thoughtful.

"Dobby, could you come here," Harry called out.

Dobby came into the room quietly. "Yes, Harry Potter, sir?"

"Dobby, Ron and I are going to leave Hogwarts tonight. We'll be sneaking out of the castle so that no one knows that we're gone. Would you like to come with us? I need someone I trust to take care of me and my home," Harry asked his friend kindly.

Dobby's large eyes filled up with tears. "Harry Potter is a good friend to Dobby. Dobby would like to be Harry Potter and Wheezy's elf. Will

Harry Potter bind Dobby to his family?" the house-elf asked with some trepidation.

"Bind you? Why would I want to do that?" Harry asked.

"That is how house-elves are used. Their magic is bound to the wizard's family and home. It decreases the chance of disloyalty and betrayal. Their magic is weaker if it's bound and they can't disobey an order if one is given," Ron explained.

Harry looked disgusted. "No, Dobby. There will be no binding of your magic. You're a free elf and you'll stay a free elf. If you decide to come with us, you'll have free reign over your magic. Personally, I think the stronger you are, the better. I have no fears of you betraying Ron or me at all. You're my friend, Dobby. I would never do anything to harm you," he stated adamantly.

Dobby looked at Harry with adoring eyes. "Dobby chooses to go with Harry Potter and Wheezy. They are Dobby's friends and they need to be cared for. Dobby will never betray them. Dobby will always protect them until Dobby dies. This is Dobby's oath," the house-elf said firmly. There was a flash of light and Ron and Harry felt magic rush over them. They looked over at Dobby and to their amazement; they saw a taller, prouder looking house-elf. To Harry, he had a slight glow surrounding him that he hadn't had before.

"Dobby, what just happened?" Harry asked curiously.

"Dobby gives Harry Potter his protection oath freely. It is rare for a house-elf to do so. Dobby must protect Harry Potter and Wheezy so Dobby gives them his oath. It makes Dobby's magic stronger. Dobby is now a strong, free elf. Much better to protect Harry Potter and Wheezy with," the house-elf answered proudly.

Harry and Ron smiled at the house-elf. "I'm glad, Dobby. I'll call for you when we get ready to leave. Go and get anything that you need to take with you." Dobby nodded then disappeared.

"Well, you learn something new everyday," Harry commented after a few minutes of silence.

"You got that right, mate," Ron replied, amused.

Harry leaned against the pillows and yawned. He was still very exhausted and his body was still weak from Azkaban. Ron watched as Harry blinked at him sleepily. "Harry, go to sleep. I'll wake you when its time." Harry nodded and closed his eyes, falling asleep instantly.

Ron got off the bed and stretched. He walked towards the bathroom to take care of some business. Several minutes later, he walked out of the bathroom and went into the main room. He looked around and debated what to do. He was startled by the knock on the door. He opened it and saw Snape standing outside. He stepped back from the doorway and let the man in.

"How can I help you, Professor?" Ron asked warily.

"I have some potions that Potter needs to take. It's for his malnutrition. There is also a couple of energy potions that should help him get around," Snape explained coolly.

"Thank you, Professor. Harry just went back to sleep."

"Has there been any improvement in his condition?" Snape asked politely.

Ron gave the man a strange look. The Potions Professor was being nice. Well as nice as he could be. That was very odd. "No, he's still not aware of his surroundings, but then it hasn't even been a full day since he left Azkaban. I'm sure it'll take some time," Ron lied smoothly.

"Yes, I'm sure. I'll leave the potions with you to be given to Potter whenever he awakens," Snape said. He walked over to the small table and set the bottles down. He turned towards Ron and nodded at him. He walked to the door, then paused and turned around. He walked back to the table and brought more vials of potions out of his pocket, setting them down on the table. He glanced over his shoulder and gave Ron an unreadable look. "The Headmaster is not a happy

man right now. He doesn't appreciate being shown up by a couple of teenagers. The contract he has unwittingly signed will not deter him for long. A person would be smart to relocate elsewhere before he has time to regroup. There are enough potions here to last a week." With that, Snape turned and walked out the door, shutting it behind him.

Ron stared at the closed door, amazed. Snape had as much as told him to leave before the Headmaster could try anything. Shaking his head, bewildered, he walked over to the bookcase and grabbed a magazine on Quidditch. He sat down on the couch and began to read.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Harry woke up several hours later to someone shaking him. He moaned in complaint and tried to hit whoever was shaking him. "Stop," he whined.

"Bloody hell, Harry. It's such a pain to wake you up," Ron exclaimed.

"M'tired," Harry slurred.

Ron chuckled. "I know, but if you want to leave Hogwarts, you need to wake up. Snape dropped off a couple of potions that you need to take. Hopefully, the energy potion he made will help you somewhat," he said.

"Snape? Git," Harry mumbled into his pillow.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Yes, Harry, Snape's a git, but you still need to wake up."

Harry rolled over and glared at Ron tiredly. "You know I hate you, right?" he asked with a yawn.

"Yep," Ron chirped cheerfully while he watched Harry sit up and leaned against the pillows. He handed one of the potions to Harry. The messy-haired boy took it and swallowed it down with a grimace. "Blah! Snape's potions always taste bad."

"True, but they'll help you," Ron said as he handed another potion. After he drank it, Ron handed him the last one and watched as he swallowed it down. Harry began to look a lot more alert and energetic.

"That's one thing I can be glad about. Once we leave, I don't have to take these stupid potions anymore," Harry commented gleefully.

The redhead smirked. "Wrong. It was strange really. When Snape dropped off your potions, he left a week's worth and basically told me to leave before the Headmaster could regroup. Apparently, our esteemed Headmaster is not a happy man. It's as we thought; he's

going to try something. We need to be sure we're gone by then," Ron said.

Harry nodded his head, looking thoughtful. "Did you know Snape visited me before my trial?" he asked.

"No. Really? What did he want?" Ron questioned.

"He came to tell me that no matter what happened, he wanted me to know that he believed me innocent of the murders. He told me there was nothing he could do since he couldn't find any proof of who had done it. He told me that even though he thought I was an arrogant child, I wasn't capable of murder. Isn't it sad that the one man who is supposed to hate you, believes you over everyone else? I was grateful to know that someone else believed me. Even if it was Snape," Harry whispered softly.

"You know its funny, but after you were thrown into Azkaban, he no longer picked on me. He still picked on Neville and Hermione, but he left me alone. I had always thought that rather strange," Ron commented thoughtfully.

"Maybe he respected you for sticking up for me," Harry replied.

Ron and Harry looked at each other and burst into laughter. The day that Snape respected any Gryffindor was the day that he told Neville he was a master at potions. Whatever the reason for Snape's actions, they were appreciated.

"Come on. You need to get up and get ready to go. Dobby has his things and he's very eager to get going. Without the Invisibility cloak, it's going to be a lot harder to sneak out. I think the doors to the castle are locked now so I'm not sure how we're getting out. I'm sure Dumbledore has all exits watched," Ron said.

Harry's eyes had darkened at the mentioned of his destroyed cloak but he smirked at the comment about the doors. "Not to worry. I know a way out of the school that even the Headmaster doesn't know about," Harry replied slyly.

"Really?" Ron asked, a interested look on his face.

Harry nodded his head and got off the bed, walked into the bathroom and shut the door. Ron looked at the door curiously and shrugged. He would find out later. He checked his pocket for his items, making sure he hadn't lost anything. The shrunken trunk and the papers with the location of the castle on it were still in his pocket. He laid them down on the bed and searched his other pocket. He pulled out the thin box and the shrunken book that he had taken out of his vault and laid them down on the bed carefully.

The bathroom door opened and Harry came out rubbing his hair with a towel. He glanced at Ron who was staring at something on the bed. He walked up behind his friend and touched him on the shoulder. Ron jumped and whirled around. "Bloody hell, mate. You shouldn't scare me like that."

Harry laughed. "What has you soon engrossed?" he asked.

"I brought you something. I've been holding it in a vault for the last eighteen months," he replied, looking flustered. Ron picked up his wand and enlarged the book, grabbed it and gave it to Harry. The messy-haired stared at it, shock shining on his face. He glanced at Ron, "How?" he asked, his voice strangled.

"I took it out of the trunk before Mum...Molly decided to burn it. I tried to save the cloak, but Hermione had already taken it and destroyed it. I grabbed this because I know how much it means to you. These are the only photos you have of your parents. I know that it's priceless to you," Ron said quietly.

Harry had tears in his eyes as he looked at the photo album he thought had been destroyed. He opened it and found the picture of his parents holding him. He ran his finger along the faces of his mother and father. He closed the book suddenly, laid it down on the bed and grabbed Ron for a quick hug. "Thank you so much, Ron," he whispered harshly, the tears clogging his throat.

Ron gave him a hard hug and took a step back. He held onto Harry's arms and squeezed. "You're welcome, mate." He watched as Harry

wiped the tears that had fallen. "Now, for the other surprise." He picked the thin box up off the bed and handed it to Harry.

Harry took the box and opened it. His mouth dropped open in amazement and disbelief. "Oh, Merlin. Ron, how in the hell did you get this? I saw it broken by Fudge after my trial," Harry said, shocked as he picked up his wand. He felt the wind move gently and the magic flowed over him. He knew wandless magic, but magic was much easier to use with a wand.

Ron smiled at his friend's happy expression. "I took one of the twin's fake wands and transfigured to look like yours. I replaced your wand right after you were arrested. I actually had Dobby's help with that. I got him to replace the wand that had been left in Dumbledore's office. It had been scanned to see what spells had been used. Since they had already confirmed that it was indeed the wand that was used to kill the students, they didn't need it. I asked Dobby to switch wands and then I took your wand and the photo album and placed them into a vault that no one knew about," Ron explained proudly.

Harry stared at his friend in amazement. "Ron, don't take this the wrong way, but that was damn Slytherin of you." Harry looked at him proudly. "You have got to be the best friend ever!"

Ron grimaced slightly at being called a Slytherin, but he didn't take offense. He knew Harry didn't mean it as an insult. He beamed with pride when Harry called him the best friend ever. Yes, he was indeed that.

"Dobby," Harry called out. The house-elf appeared before him. The glow that surrounded him was stronger. He glanced at Ron and asked, "Can you see the glow that surrounds Dobby?"

Ron looked at the house-elf and shook his head. "No, why can you?"

"Yes, I noticed it right after he made the oath. It was weak, but it was there. Now, it's brighter. It's a soft yellow glow with small streaks of greens and blues intertwined," Harry explained.

"Figures," Ron sighed with a roll of his eyes.

"What do you mean by that?" Harry asked, irritated.

"It sounds like you can see magic. It is not a rare ability, but it's not common. About two wizards out of thirty have the ability. Bill has it, which makes him such a good curse breaker. You can see the magic that surrounds magical creatures. Later you may develop the ability to see the magical auras of Wizards or objects. It takes time to develop. You may try to develop it later when you have the chance," Ron explained.

Harry looked thoughtful then nodded. "All right. Now, are we ready to go?"

Ron and Dobby nodded eagerly. "Right then, lets go." They turned to walk towards the door when Harry stopped. He looked at Ron anxiously. "What if the Headmaster put a tracking spell on us? He would know the instant we leave this room."

Ron chewed on his lips thoughtfully. "It's a distinct possibility. He was in this room several times today before I changed the password. I'm not sure how to get rid of a tracking spell."

"Dobby can check," the small house-elf piped up. "Dobby can see if there are spells on Harry Potter and Wheezy. Dobby has stronger magic now. Dobby needs it to protect Harry Potter and Wheezy," he said.

"All right, go ahead." Harry watched as Dobby's hand glowed softly as he waved it over Ron and Harry. Dobby looked grim and his eyes were squinted with concentration. He growled slightly, startling Harry and Ron. They looked at the house-elf, concerned. There was a sudden rush of magic, then Dobby's eyes widened. He waved his other hand and two mice appeared. Dobby waved his hand over the mice and froze them. He disappeared for a second then reappeared, looking satisfied.

He smiled at them happily. "Dobby found several spells. Dobby took them off Harry Potter and Wheezy. Dobby placed the spells on the

mice then froze them and put them into Harry Potter's bed. The Headmaster shouldn't put spells on Harry Potter and Wheezy. Headmaster is a bad wizard," Dobby said with a growl.

Ron and Harry stared at Dobby with wide eyes. Ever since Dobby gave them the oath, he has become a different house-elf. He was a lot more aggressive and assertive. Harry liked the change, but it was something to get use too.

"Thank you, Dobby," Harry said. Dobby beamed up at Harry.

"Well, then, everyone lets go," Ron stated.

They walked out of the room quickly. They made their way down the hall, staying in the shadows. Harry glanced around corners to make sure that no one was in the hallways. He heard Ron comment about how much easier it would be to sneak out of the castle with the map and cloak. Harry felt a pang at the comment, but shook it off. They walked down several hallways and up a couple of stairs. They had finally reached the corridor that Harry had been looking for when they heard footsteps. They scrambled back into the shadows and waited for the person to pass. The dark figure was upon them and had just walked past when it stopped. The dark figure turned around slowly and growled out, "I don't know what you possibly thought you were accomplishing by sneaking out tonight, but I will be taking points and there will be detentions. Now, show yourselves."

Harry and Ron stayed still. They knew that voice. Snape had been roaming the halls, searching for sneaking teenagers. "I mean now, before you lose any more points."

Not knowing what to do they stood still before Ron sighed and walked forward, out of the darkness. "Evening, Professor. You can take all the points you want, but it won't do you any good."

Snape looked at Ron, a surprised expression on his face. "What are you doing skulking around at this time of night, Mr. Weasley?" he asked suspiciously.

"Taking your advice," Ron retorted.

Snape arched an eyebrow. "The doors out of the castle are several floors down. There's nothing on the floor that will get you out of the castle."

"Yes, actually, there is," a voice called from the darkness. Snape peered into the shadow trying to see who made the comment. Harry Potter walked out of the darkness, eyes alert and very much aware. "You just have to know how to get there."

"Potter."

"Snape."

The two men looked at each other for a few minutes before Snape sighed, irritation showing on his face. "I see you have recovered your awareness."

Harry smirked at his old teacher. "The rumors of my catatonic state are highly exaggerated."

Snape gave Harry a small smirk in return. "Meaning you were aware the whole time?" he inquired.

Harry gave a small nod. "Of course."

"How very Slytherin of you," Snape said coolly, hoping to get a reaction from the young man.

Harry smiled at him and replied, "Of course it was. I was supposed to be a Slytherin, you know. I had to argue with the Hat to let me be in Gryffindor. I had just met Malfoy," he said with a grimace.

Snape stared at Harry, shocked. "What?"

"You heard me. As much as I would like to discuss this, Ron and I really need to go before the Headmaster finds out we're not where we're supposed to be. Perhaps when time allows it, we can continue this conversation at a later time. Maybe you would like to come by for tea?" Harry asked.

Snape studied the young man before him realizing that Potter was serious in his invitation. "I look forward to it. Very well, then. Good night, gentlemen. I never saw you." He turned and walked down the corridor. He stopped a moment and turned back towards them. "I would like to know how you're getting out of the castle. All the exits are watched and the front doors are closed and locked."

Harry gave Snape a wicked grin and replied, "Not to worry Snape, I have a way to leave the castle that even the Headmaster doesn't know about. Let's just say that only I and one other can get open the door."

Snape looked at him in confusion then his eyes widened. He gave Harry a small nod. "Very well, Potter. I will be seeing you later." With that said, the man whirled around and stalked down the hallway, his robes flowing out behind him.

"Well, that was bloody bizarre," Ron commented as they began to walk down the corridor and Harry hummed in agreement.

"Why didn't you tell me we were going there?" Ron asked with a groan as he suddenly realized where they were going. Harry just grinned and the continued walking until they arrived in front of the door they needed. Harry opened it and walked in. The girl's bathroom looked the same from the last time he had been here. He looked around for Moaning Myrtle, but didn't see her. He made sure the door was shut and locked it when everyone was in.

"She asked to be sent to the other side," Ron commented.

"Huh?" Harry asked absently.

"Moaning Myrtle. She got tired of being a ghost, so she asked Dumbledore to send her to the other side. She no longer haunts the bathroom," Ron explained.

"Oh."

Harry walked over to the sink and stopped in front of it. "Open," he hissed in Parseltongue. They watched as the sink moved and the opening was revealed. After a few minutes of staring, Ron commented warily, "I haven't been here since my second year. I bet it's going to be just as creepy."

"Not really. I cleaned it up some. I came back here many times. This was the one place where nobody could find me. I also investigated the Chamber, which is how I know of the exit from the castle. You ready?" Harry asked.

"As much as I'll ever be," Ron said with resignation.

Harry smiled brightly at Ron. "See you on the other side," he quipped before jumping down the hole and disappearing. Ron could hear his shouts of excitement. He looked at Dobby and asked, "Ready, Dobby?" The house-elf nodded vigorously and jumped down the hole. Ron could hear his squeaks of excitement. With a sigh, he jumped down the hole. He slid down the pipe at a high speed. He finally reached the bottom and stood up, swaying a little. He noticed Harry watching him with concern.

"You alright there, Ron?" Harry asked.

Ron waved off Harry's concern and looked around. He saw that the bones of the dead animals were gone. Harry must have gotten rid of them after one of his visits. It didn't matter though the cavern still looked creepy. He walked over to Harry and waved him forward. They walked past the pile of rocks that had fallen the last time Ron had been down here. He shivered at the memories of Ginny, Harry and that twit, Lockhart. They came upon a large, round seal that had snakes carved on it on it. Harry spoke in Parseltongue and Ron shivered. It was always freaky to hear Harry hissing like a snake. He watched as the seal opened.

Harry pulled the seal open the rest of the way and they all made their way in. They walked into the Chamber and Ron looked around. He hadn't ever been this far before. He noticed the large statues of snakes that were lining the long walkway. He followed Harry, who had begun to walk towards the front of the Chamber.

Harry glanced around the Chamber. It had been a while since he had been here, but nothing had changed. They came upon the large statue of Salazar Slytherin. Harry gave him a mocking salute and went past the statue to a corridor to the left of the statue. He walked down the corridor and stopped at a door. He opened the door and went inside. He waited for Ron and Dobby to appear. When they were all in the room, he waited and smiled when he heard Ron.

"Bloody hell, there isn't anything in this room. Why are we here?"

Harry snickered and walked up to a brick wall that had a snake emblem hanging on it. "Reveal," he hissed. The brick wall disappeared and there was an opening to a dark corridor. "Lights," he hissed and the corridor lit up. Harry began to walk with Ron and Dobby following. It took them several minutes before they came upon a door. Harry hissed again and the door opened. They moved past the door and found themselves inside a cave. Harry turned and shut the door and with a hiss, locked it. With another hiss, the door disappeared.

Ron took out his wand and called out, "Lumos." Light filled the darkened cave.

"The entrance to the cave is just around the bend. After that, we can apparate to the castle. We are beyond Hogwarts wards now," Harry said.

"Before we go, I have a question. How does the entrance to the Chamber disappear? We left it standing open in the girl's bathroom. Dumbledore is bound to find it and know how we left," Ron said anxiously.

Harry looked at him a moment before grinning. He pointed towards the door that had disappeared. "When I closed and locked that door, all openings to the Chamber were sealed. There is no way for the Headmaster to get down here or to know that we used the Chamber to leave. Even the locking spell that I used on the bathroom door will dissipate in another hour," Harry explained.

Ron blew out a breath of relief. "Good. The less Dumbledore knows about what we do, the better," he said. "Come on. Let's go."

They ambled towards the opening of the cave before finally reaching the opening. They walked out and stood in what looked like a forest. It was dark, and the moon was shining brightly in the night sky. The wind was moving gently through the forest and one could hear the howls of wolves far off to the north.

Harry looked over at Ron with a hopeful expression. "You can apparate, can't you?" he asked and Ron nodded. "Good, because I can't. You'll have to apparate me to my castle."

"All right, but as soon as you can, you're learning how to apparate," Ron commented.

"Agreed." Harry looked at Dobby. "You can find your way, right?"

Dobby nodded his head vigorously. "Dobby can find Harry Potter wherever he is at now."

"Good. Ron and I will apparate first, then you follow." Dobby nodded in agreement.

"Ready, Harry?" Ron asked.

"Sure, why the hell not." Harry grabbed onto Ron's arm and waited.

Ron disappeared and reappeared in front of some castle ruins. Dobby appeared at Ron's side a moment later. Harry glanced around the area. "Where exactly is this castle located?" he asked as he poked around the ruins.

"According to the papers the goblin gave me, it's on the outskirts of Cashel. The muggles see nothing but ruins because of the wards that surround the castle. The rightful owner of the castle should be able to find the passageway into the castle," Ron explained as he looked around the ruins.

"Found it," Harry called from inside the ruins. Ron followed the sound of Harry's voice. He found Harry standing in front of a stone wall that had revealed a passageway. "I think this used to be a cathedral," Harry said as he pointed to the crosses that were engraved on the wall. They entered the passageway and felt the magic of the wards as they passed through them. They heard the wall slip back into place, once again blocking the way they came. They walked out of the passageway and stopped in surprise. There in front of them stood a large Irish Castle.

"Wow! It's not as large as Hogwarts, but it's still large nonetheless. Just think Harry, this belongs to you," Ron said excitedly.

Harry smiled at Ron's excitement. He looked over at the eager house-elf. "Dobby, I have to ask you something," he said.

"Yes, Harry Potter?" Dobby asked.

"Will you be our secret keeper?" Harry asked the house-elf.

Ron looked surprised before grinning widely. "Brilliant idea, Harry. No one would think of asking a house-elf your location," he stated excitedly.

Dobby eyes welled up with tears. "Harry Potter trusts Dobby?"

"Yes, Dobby, I do. I had planned on asking you before your oath. That was one of the reasons I wanted you to come with us. Since you gave us the oath, I knew I was making the right choice. Do you want to do it?" Harry asked.

Dobby nodded with joy. "Dobby would be honored to be your secret keeper," he squeaked out, his happiness obvious.

"Thank you, Dobby." Harry pulled out his wand and performed the Fidelius spell. They saw the castle waver in front of them. They knew the spell had worked. Dumbledore wouldn't be finding this place anytime soon.

Ron looked at Harry, confused. "Why is it you can do the Fidelius spell, but you can't apparate?" he asked.

Harry shrugged carelessly. "Dumbledore made sure I knew how to perform the spell in case I needed it for whatever reason. Of course, I don't think he thought I could perform it since it's a high level spell."

Ron snorted with annoyance. "This from the student who could perform the Patronus spell in his third year? Yeah, right."

Harry just grinned at him and put his arm around Ron's shoulder. He looked at the castle then back at Ron. "Well, Ron, me lad, lets go check out our new home." With that, the three of them walked up to the cobbled stone trail to the castle doors.

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CHAPTER SIX

They strode up the pathway to the castle doors. Harry gazed around the grounds, unable to see much in the darkness. What he could see were immaculate grounds and he thought he could hear water trickling nearby. It looked like someone was taking care of the castle.

They reached the door and Harry stepped forward and raised his hand to knock. He touched the door and to his surprise, the door opened effortlessly. Warily, he stared at the door wondering what was going on. He looked over at Ron who shrugged. "Maybe we should go in now?" Ron asked.

"Might as well. The door's open." Harry put his hand on the door and gently pushed it open. He walked into the castle and stopped, waiting for Ron and Dobby to follow. He was standing in a small foyer that led into a large hallway. He noticed that columns of marble lined the hallway. A large hallway ended at a staircase, which led to the second floor. The high cathedral ceilings had to be a least twenty-seven feet with wooden rafters. There were large fifteen-foot windows lined on the left side of the hallway, which showed a beautiful garden that was lit with small fairy lights.

On the right side of the hall were several doors that led to other parts of the castle. Harry was in awe at the opulence of the castle. If this was just the hallway, he couldn't imagine what the rest of the castle was going to be like.

"Blimey Harry, it's gorgeous. It's not as large as Hogwarts, but still just as nice," Ron said in awe.

Harry nodded excitedly. "Yes and unlike Hogwarts, this castle is mine." Harry had moved farther into the hall when he heard something.

"Who are you and how did you get in here?" a female voice asked behind them.

Harry and Ron whipped around, wands out, pointing towards the voice. A muted white figure was standing by the door near the foyer.

The ghostly figure glided towards Harry. "I ask again, who are you and how did you get in here?" she demanded.

"I am Harry James Potter and I own the castle," Harry replied warily.

The ghost floated up to Harry and looked him up and down. Harry took the opportunity to look over the ghostly figure. The ghost was a woman, with long flowing hair. Harry was unable to discern what color her hair had been since there was no color on the ghost. She was wearing a long flowing gown made from some sort of heavy material. It looked to be a very old dress, possibly from the 1300's.

The ghost suddenly smiled at Harry. "I see you are indeed a Potter. That is good. Only a Potter may open the doors to this castle. I'm glad to see the wards still work. Who are your friends?" she asked.

Harry patted Ron on the arm. "This is my best friend and brother by choice, Ron Bilius Weasley soon to be Black." Ron gave the ghost a nod and Harry pointed at the proud looking house-elf. "This is my friend Dobby who will be taking care of Ron and me."

"There will be no binding of house-elves to this home," the ghost said sternly. "We do not allow such an atrocious practice in this castle. All elves that enter this castle are free."

Harry smiled gently at the ghost. "Dobby is not a bound elf. He has been free for many years. He is a good friend and I would never think to bind him to me."

"Harry Potter is a good wizard. Harry Potter freed Dobby from a bad wizard many years ago. Dobby has given Harry Potter and Wheezy his oath of protection. Dobby stands here free and strong in magic. Harry Potter has given this to Dobby and in return, Dobby will take care of Harry Potter and Wheezy. No matter what!" the house-elf said firmly, glaring at the ghost.

The ghost smiled at the house-elf. "Forgive me Dobby, I did not know. The last Potter to visit tried to bring in a bound house-elf. The castle would not accept him."

"Was it my father?" Harry asked curiously.

The ghost shook her head. "No, there hasn't been a Potter or a visitor in this castle for over a hundred years."

"Why ever not?" Ron asked, surprised. Hell, if he had owned the castle he would've moved in long ago.

The ghostly figure smiled. "There were various reasons, one was not accepted because of the house-elf, and the other would have rather lived in other homes. Your grandfather decided that he had no use for a castle and I believe your father never had the time to visit," she answered thoughtfully.

"May I ask who you are?" Harry asked curiously.

"Oh, how rude of me. I am Roselyn Heather Potter. I believe I am your great grandmother many times removed. You may call me Rose or Grandmother, whichever you choose. I am not around a lot as I usually haunt the castle tower, but I make occasional trips to the main part of the castle," Rose explained.

"It's nice to meet you. I was wondering if you could direct us to a room for the night," Harry asked.

"Of course. Sage," Rose called out and a house-elf appeared.

"Yes, Mistress Rose?" Sage asked.

"Could you please show these two gentlemen to their rooms? Afterwards, you may show Dobby to the house-elf living quarters," Rose said.

Sage nodded her head. "Of course, Mistress Rose. Follow me please."

Rose looked over at Harry and gave him a nod. "We will talk tomorrow. Until then." She gave Harry and Ron a gentle smile, then floated out of the room. Harry watched her leave with interest. It was

funny that he had grandmother who happened to be a ghost. He shrugged at the thought and focused his attention on Sage.

Harry, Ron, and Dobby followed Sage up the stairs. She turned left and walked down the hallway. She stopped in front of another staircase and waited for them to catch up before ascending the stairs. When she reached the third floor, she turned right and moved down the hallway before stopping in front of a door. She opened the door and looked at Harry.

"This room is for you, Master Harry. The door to the right of me is for your friend, Master Ron. There is an interconnecting door inside your room that allows easy passage to both of your rooms. If you need anything, please feel free to call me and I will help you." Sage looked at Dobby, "If you would be so kind as to follow me, I will show you where you will stay."

Dobby looked at Harry for permission and Harry nodded his head. "You don't need my permission, Dobby. Do what you like. I'll call you if I need anything. Try to get to know the castle for I might need your help later."

"Yes, Harry Potter." Dobby and Sage disappeared and Harry entered his room. Ron followed him and looked around the room. It was a very large suite done in yellows and blues. Ron whistled at the elegance of the room. "Harry, mate, I think I'm going to like being your brother," Ron said with a grin.

Harry shook his head, amused, walked over to the couch. He sat down and sighed tiredly. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes, feeling weak and shaky. The potions that Ron had given him were beginning to wear off. It was still too soon after Azkaban to be doing a lot.

"You all right there, Harry?" Ron asked, concerned.

Harry opened his eyes and looked at his friend. "Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just very tired. I still feel weak and shaky. It was really too soon for me to do anything, but we needed to leave Hogwarts. There was no way I was about to stay there."

"What you need is some food then some more sleep. It's too soon for you to take any of your potions," Ron said.

Harry nodded in agreement, closed his eyes, and listened as Ron called Sage. When she appeared, Ron asked her for some food. She left and Ron walked over to the door on the right side of the room. He opened it and went through it. Harry's eyes opened when he heard a yell from the next room. He got up and ran over to the door. He looked in the room and found Ron staring around, a disgusted look on his face.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked, concerned.

"Bloody Hell! This is a Slytherin room, Harry. There's no way I can sleep in green and silver colors," Ron exclaimed with horror.

Harry looked around and noticed that Ron was right. The room was done in silver and green. There was even a snake motif around the room, making the room very elegant. Harry looked back at Ron and grinned, amused at the sick look on Ron's face.

"We can change rooms, Ron. I have no problems with this room," Harry said.

"You sure Harry?" Ron asked. "We don't have to. I can force myself to stay in here," he stated with a frown.

Harry shook his head and grinned. "It's not a problem, Ron. You take the other room and I'll keep this one."

Ron patted Harry on the back. "Thanks, Harry! You're all right."

The redhead turned around and practically ran out of the room. Harry followed, still grinning in amusement. He noticed that Sage had come back with the food and had left it on the table. He walked over, sat down, and began to eat. He watched as Ron dug into his food and ate with gusto. Many things may have changed over the nineteen months, but apparently, Ron's appetite hadn't.

Harry sat back after he had finished eating and blinked at Ron with sleepy eyes. He yawned widely and stared off into the distance. He was startled out of his thoughts by Ron asking him if he was all right.

He turned his attention towards Ron and nodded. "Yeah, I'm ready for bed. I think I'll go and lay down. I'll talk to you tomorrow." Harry got up from the table and walked into his room. He walked towards the bed and flung himself down, cuddling up to the pillow. He yawned widely one more time and wondering briefly how Dumbledore was going to react when he realized that Harry was no longer at Hogwarts. With a smirk, he drifted off to sleep.

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A scream filled the air and a voice yelled out, "No not Harry!" There was a flash of green light and the sound of a body falling to the floor. The dark evil laughter echoed throughout the darkness.

"It's your fault, Potter. It was because of you they died. Your parents, Cedric, your pathetic godfather, those disgusting students, it's all your fault. If you hadn't lived, they wouldn't have died." Evil chuckling surrounded him.

"No, it's not my fault. It's yours! You were the ones who killed them or had them killed. I don't blame myself anymore, Tom," Harry yelled.

"DON'T CALL ME THAT!" Voldemort shrieked in anger.

"What's the matter, Tom? Identity crisis?" Harry asked mockingly.

Voldemort hissed with anger., "Crucio," he yelled and Harry felt pain. He gritted his teeth, refusing to give in to the pain. Voldemort cancelled the spell and Harry panted. He glanced around the darkness. "Please, Tommy boy, that was barely a tickle. Can't you do better than that?" Harry asked, he voice snide.

Cruel laughter filled the darkness. "If you insist. Look, Potter, see what I have done. This will happen to everyone you care about."

A light lit up in the middle of the darkness and with a sense of dread, Harry walked over. He noticed a body lay in the middle of the light. Harry knelt down and turned the body over. He gasped, horrified at the sight before him. It was Ron. Harry grabbed him frantically and felt his neck for a pulse. He gave a sob of pain when he felt nothing. The bloody body was still and there was no sign of life.

"No! Please Merlin No! Not Ron!" he cried, his voice fill with anger and pain.

"Let this be warning to you, Potter. All those who you care for shall die. This is just the beginning. Enjoy my little present." With that, Voldemort disappeared with an evil laugh.

Harry grabbed Ron's still body and rocked back and forth, sobbing. "Ron, no please, Ron..." he muttered.

"RON!" he screamed.

Harry awoke with a gasp, terror filling his body. He looked around and realized where he was. He scrambled off the bed and ran from the room. He hurried into Ron's room and moved swiftly towards the bed. He saw that Ron was lying sprawled out on the bed. He jumped on the bed and reached for Ron's neck, searching frantically. He slumped in relief as he felt a pulse beating strongly beneath his fingers.

Ron was startled out of his sleep by his bed shaking. He gazed around and noticed that a frantic looking Harry was sitting on his bed. He watched as Harry came towards him, feeling around his neck. It dawned on him what Harry was searching for. He watched as Harry slumped in relief at feeling his pulse.

"Harry, mate, you ok?" he asked.

Harry whipped his head up and stared at him blankly. After a few seconds of silence, he seemed to shake it off and nodded. "Yeah, it was a bloody nightmare. I forgot where I was for a second or two."

"What did you dream about?" Ron asked.

Harry looked away from Ron and gazed out the window. Dawn was getting close and the sky was starting to turn a pink. He hadn't realized that he had slept that long, but he knew there was no way he was getting back to sleep.

"I dreamt that Voldemort had killed you. When I awoke, I had an overwhelming urge to see if you were all right. You were, of course," Harry said with a sheepish look.

"Blimey, Harry. You all right?" the redhead inquired.

"Yeah, I was fine once I realized it was a dream, but I have no urge to go back to sleep now," Harry sighed heavily. "I think I'll investigate the castle, see if I can't find a library or something. You go back to sleep. I'll see you at breakfast."

"You sure? I can stay up with you," Ron replied in the midst of a large yawn.

Harry shook his head. "I'm sure. Maybe I can find Dobby or something. I might even check out the tower and talk to Rose. You go back to sleep."

Ron nodded sleepily and yawned widely. "All right, mate. You know where I am if you need me."

Harry patted the drowsy man on the arm. "I know. I'll talk to you later."

Ron murmured softly as he fell back to sleep. Harry got off the bed carefully and walked back to his room. He looked around and found the door for the bathroom. He entered the room and cleaned up, getting ready for the day. He walked out of the bathroom, rubbing his hair dry with a towel. He realized he had nothing to wear.

"Dobby," he called out.

The house-elf appeared in front of him. "Yes, Harry Potter?"

"You know after all this time I think it's about time you call me Harry. Just Harry," Harry said with a wry grin.

"All right, Just Harry," Dobby replied, grinning slyly.

Harry chuckled. "You know what I mean. You're my friend and that gives you the right to use my name."

"If you insist, Harry," Dobby murmured.

"I do. I need to know if you can find me any clothes. I have nothing to wear and I haven't had time to shop for anything," Harry said.

"Dobby will ask Sage. Dobby doesn't know the castle very well yet. Harry will wait?" Dobby asked.

"I can wait," Harry replied.

Dobby nodded and then disappeared. Harry walked over to the window and looked out. He looked at the scenery in awe. There was a large pond with fog dancing on the surface. He could see the dew on the grass, which was beginning to sparkle in the early morning light. He noticed there were some small hills in the background and large forest to the right of the property. He smiled; he could roam there in his wolf form. That reminded him; he needed to let Ron know about his animagus form.

He heard Dobby pop back into the room and turned around. Dobby was laying some clothes on the bed. Harry walked over to investigate. He noticed that there was a dark silver shirt and black pants. Dobby had also brought a pair of black shoes, with socks and underwear.

"Thank you, Dobby. I appreciate your help."

"Harry is welcome. Dobby wants to know if Harry is ready for breakfast?" the house-elf inquired.

Harry shook his head. "No, not yet. I'm going to check out the castle to see if I can find a library. I'll have breakfast when Ron does."

Dobby looked at him intently and asked, "Is it time for your potions?"

Harry paused a moment, thinking carefully, before shaking his head. "No, not for a couple of hours."

"Very well. Dobby will find Harry when it is time for breakfast."

"Thank you, Dobby." The house-elf nodded and then disappeared.

Harry looked down at the clothes and began to change. He sat down on the bed to slip on his shoes when he heard a tap on the window. He glanced up and noticed an owl on the ledge. Confused by who would be sending him an owl he walked over and opened the window.

"Hedwig!" Harry cried excitedly. Hedwig flew in and landed on his shoulder, hooting frantically, pecking softly at Harry's hair. He petted her gently, trying to calm her down. He relished the feeling of being with his owl once again. He had never known what had happened to Hedwig, as Ron hadn't been taking care of her.

"It's good to see you again, girl. I was afraid something had happened to you. Where have you been, sweetheart?" he crooned to his owl.

Hedwig hooted softly, nibbling on his ear affectionately. She lifted her left foot and Harry noticed a letter attached to it. Curious as to who could be sending him a letter, he reached up and took the letter off her foot. He untied the parchment and began to read.

Harry,

I heard from a friend that you were out of Azkaban and that you were innocent. I'm so very glad to hear that. I've missed you and I know that you would've never done something as bad as they said you did.

I'm sending a letter along with Hedwig. I've been taking care of her since you were thrown in prison. Once I heard you were out, I knew that I had to send her to you. She has been mighty antsy for days and I now I know why.

I'm sorry that I wasn't there for you, Harry. Dumbledore had sent me out on a mission and I never knew about your trial until after the fact. I was very angry Harry, to hear that your friends had turned on you. I know that you don't have many friends now except for Ron, which I'm very glad to hear about, but I wanted you to know that I believe in you, Harry. I'm sorry that I hadn't been able to visit you. I'm living in France now with Olympe Maxime. I decided that I couldn't be around those who had betrayed you.

I hope to see you soon and I would love it if you came for a visit.

Your friend always,

Rubeus Hagrid

Harry sighed, a warm feeling filling him as he read the note. He was happy to know that his first friend believed in him. He would make sure that he visited Hagrid when he got the chance. Not until later though. As much as Harry cared for his friend, Hagrid was never one that could keep a secret. He wasn't ready for people to know about his current condition. He remembered that he had promised to ask Snape to come for a visit. He would have to make sure to invite the man sometime later this week.

Harry moved over to the door of his room, opened it, and walked out. He ambled down the hallway, glancing around at the portraits, noticing that he resembled many of the people in the portraits. Majority of the portraits he had passed were sleeping so Harry didn't bother them. He walked down the staircase that led to the second floor and began to investigate the second floor. He found several bedrooms, a sewing room, a den, and a large ballroom. Finding nothing else of interest, he headed towards the staircase that led to the main floor. He made his way down the stairs and when he reached the first floor, he went through the first door he saw.

To his delight, he had found the library. The library was huge, almost as large as the one from Hogwarts. There had to be a least ten thousand books here. The bookshelves reached all the way up to the ceiling, which were at least twenty-seven feet high. Harry was curious how one got to the books at the top of the bookshelf. He looked

around and couldn't find a ladder. A pedestal caught his attention and he wandered over. On the pedestal, a large book glowed slightly. Curious, Harry opened the book and noticed that it was full of book titles. He also noticed that sitting above the book was a small crystal stick. Harry grabbed it and looked it over wondering what it could be. He fumbled with the stick and dropped it on the book. The stick hit one of the book titles and it glowed briefly. To Harry's surprise, a book appeared on the small table that sat next to the pedestal.

Harry picked up the book and noticed that the title matched the one that had glowed briefly. Excited, Harry grabbed the crystal stick and started to skim through the book. Several titles caught his attention, but he didn't select them. One title finally caught his interest, The Potter Family Lineage. Harry touched the title with the crystal stick, watching as the title glowed briefly. He watched the small table expectantly and grinned when the book appeared. He set the crystal stick down and grabbed the book off the table.

He walked over to the large plush chair that was sitting in the corner and sat down, opened the book and began to read.

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A couple hours later, he was startled out of his reading by Dobby appearing before him.

"Harry, it's time for breakfast," he announced. "Wheezy is waiting in the small dining room."

Harry shut the book carefully and put it down on the table next to the chair. He nodded his head in thanks, got up, and followed Dobby out of the library. He strode down the hallway, passing couple of doors before stopping in front of large doorway. He entered and found a small dining room with a large, oblong table made of dark cherry wood sitting in the center of the room. Ron was sitting at the table, watching the door impatiently.

"It's about bloody time," the redhead snapped, irritated. "I thought I was going to waste away while waiting for Dobby to find you. A man

has needs you know. I'm hungry. You shouldn't be keeping me waiting."

Harry rolled his eyes. "You aren't going to die if you don't eat right this minute."

"The hell you say," Ron retorted with mock outrage, his eyes showing his amusement.

Harry snorted and sat down at the table. He nodded at Dobby who disappeared. He glanced at Ron. "Did you sleep ok?"

Ron winced a little. "Not too bad. Right nasty dreams I was having, but then again that's normal anymore."

Harry frowned at Ron slightly. "I'm sorry to hear that."

Ron shrugged carelessly. "Not much you can do about it. You have your own dreams to worry about," he replied.

"True," Harry said somberly. His face brightened, "Oh, guess what. I got a letter from Hagrid this morning. Hedwig delivered it. Apparently, he's been taking care of her while I was in Azkaban."

"Oi! Really? That's right nice of him. What did he have to say?" Ron asked, his face showing his interest.

"He wanted me to know that he was glad I was no longer in Azkaban and that he never believed I killed those students," Harry answered cheerfully.

Ron nodded. "He's right, you know. He was the one person who never treated me any differently. Whenever things got too bad with the Weasleys, or the other students, I knew I could always go have tea with him. We would talk about unimportant things. It helped to know that there was someone there for me. I was sad to see him move to France, but he's living with Madame Maxime so it's good for him. He always told me that he never believed that you were capable of murder," he said with an absent smile, his mind on the half-giant that had been his only friend after Harry's arrest and imprisonment.

Harry smiled at Ron. "Yeah, it made me happy to know that he believed in me."

Dobby appeared with the food and placed it on the table. Harry rolled his eyes in exasperation at Ron's excited grumbling. One would think the man never ate. He watched, slightly disgusted, as Ron dug into his food and ate like a man starving. He shook his head and scooped some eggs onto his plate. He grabbed some fruit and some toast, placing them on his plate before eating slowly, still not use to large amounts of food.

Dobby appeared before him and placed three bottles of potions in front of Harry. The house-elf looked at him sternly. "Harry needs to take his medicine. Dobby will watch to be sure that Harry has done so." He crossed his arms and stared at Harry intently.

He heard Ron snickering at the adamant house-elf, and with a sigh, he opened the first bottle. He gave a slight grimace when he drank the nutrient potion. When he finished that potion, he opened the bottle with the light blue potion and drank it down. This one tasted slightly better as it tasted a little like fruit. He felt the energy potion working, and with another sigh, he opened the last bottle. He drank it and could feel the buzz begin throughout his body. He felt alert and energetic. He knew it would wear off later, but for now, he was feeling good.

"Thank you, Dobby," he said.

The house-elf nodded, satisfied, and disappeared with the empty potion bottles. Harry looked over at the amused looking Ron and sneered. The redhead began to laugh. "I'm glad you have to take them and not me."

Harry grunted and began to eat his breakfast. The room was quiet while they ate and Harry was roused out of his thoughts by a snicker from Ron.

"What?" Harry asked curiously.

"I wonder if Dumbledore got his letter from Gringott's yet?" Ron asked idly.

Harry gave Ron a vicious smile. "He better enjoy what time he has left because I'm going to make him rue the day that he took advantage of me." He watched as Ron smirked in agreement.

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Albus Dumbledore was staring out of the window of his office. He gazed at the Hogwarts grounds, his mind wandering. He was angry by his loss of control over Harry. He hadn't thought that Ron was going to be much of a threat, but Ron had blocked every attempt Dumbledore had gone through to gain control of Harry.

His hand clenched tightly around the letter he had received this morning. The accounts that he had opened from the Potter and Black fortune were closed. The accounts that he had opened to bribe Fudge and some of the Ministry workers were closed. He knew that before too long, he would lose their support. He was seething by the loss of money. No one had realized that the Dumbledore fortune was almost nonexistent. He had used what fortune he had in the first war with Voldemort to finance the Order. When the Potters died, he realized that it had been the perfect opportunity to get more money and live in the style to which he had become accustomed. With his contacts in the Ministry, and some bribes, he was named executor of the Potter fortune. He'd even made sure that Black was sent to Azkaban without a trial, so that the man couldn't interfere. Now all that work was for nothing. The money he had used to live, for bribes and to finance the Order was gone, and he was furious.

He hadn't thought that Ron had would've gone to Gringotts so fast and that had been his first mistake. His second was thinking that the young man would be a pushover. It was becoming very apparent that the young man was someone to be reckoned with. He was in charge of Harry's care and if Dumbledore didn't want to lose his power, he couldn't interfere. He hissed angrily at the thought of the contract that he had unknowingly signed. He was pissed that a teenager had tricked him and he never knew it. If he didn't need Harry so much to

fight against Voldemort, he would try to get rid of the young man himself.

Deciding that there wasn't much he could do right now, he headed towards the Great Hall to eat breakfast. He would use this time to try to break Ron down. He was sure he could get Ron to change his mind about Harry. If not, well, there were other measures of getting him to change his mind. He caressed the potion vial in the pocket of his robe. If I can't change his mind, then I will command one of the house-elves to pour this into his tea. After that, he will be open to any suggestions I make. I will not allow that young man to interfere with my plans, he thought angrily, a murderous look on his face.

He quickly plastered a kind and benevolent look on his face and strode into the Great Hall. He walked up to the head table and nodded towards Minerva and Severus. He noticed that Ron hadn't made it to breakfast yet and called for a house-elf.

"Winky," he called.

The house-elf appeared before Dumbledore. "Yes, Headmaster?" she inquired.

"Could you please find Ron Weasley and let him know that breakfast is ready," Dumbledore said kindly.

Winky looked at him with wide eyes and shook her head. "Winky is sorry Headmaster, but Wheezy is no longer in the castle."

"What?" Dumbledore asked, shocked.

Winky nodded her head vigorously. "Wheezy, Harry Potter, and Dobby all left last night, Headmaster. Winky was told to give you this if you asked for them." She walked up to the head table and handed the Headmaster a letter.

Dumbledore opened the letter and began to read. A few minutes later, he cursed loudly and violently, then he got up from his chair and walked out of the Great Hall furiously, not realizing he had dropped

the letter. Minerva stared at the Headmaster, her expression shocked, while Snape watched him leave with a smirk.

Quietly, so that the Transfiguration teacher couldn't hear, Snape said "Accio note." The note flew into his hand and he quickly hid it in his pocket. He ate the rest of his breakfast, and with a nod towards Minerva, he swept out of the Great Hall, his robe twirling around him dramatically.

He made his way down to his quarters, stopping in front of a portrait of a snake. He muttered his password and swept inside once the door opened. He walked over to the small table and poured himself some scotch. He knew that it was too early to start drinking it, but he felt that he needed it. Things have been tense over the last couple of days, and now that Weasley left with Potter and that house-elf, he knew that he would need it to fortify himself for later. He moved over to his desk and sat down. He placed his snifter down on the table and pulled out the note he had hidden.

Dear Dumbledore,

If you're reading this, then you know that I've left Hogwarts with Harry. I'm bringing Dobby along so that he may take care of Harry. I don't think I could've left Hogwarts without him. Since he's a free elf, he doesn't need your permission to leave.

I just want you to know that I don't trust you not to try something. I'm sure by now you have gotten your letter from Gringotts letting you know that all the accounts you had opened in the Potter and Black name are closed. I don't know the reason for your theft nor do I care.

Know this Dumbledore, if you try anything, or if I somehow become incapacitated, then my proof will be sent to the Ministry and to the papers. Your reputation will be smirched and your standing in the Wizarding World will fall, and if I'm lucky, your arse will be thrown into Azkaban.

I also know there are spells and potions that you can use to try to control me. I have made arrangements for that. If I do not appear at certain places at certain times, the information will be sent. If I do

make it and I'm not spell free and potion free, then the information will be sent. Also, do not try to use my Emancipation Rite as leverage, because it will not work. I'll just go around you. I have no qualms about doing this, Dumbledore. Remember, I have you by the balls and I'm not letting go.

A word of warning, I'm protecting a friend and I'll use whatever means I need too to keep him safe and out of your clutches. You had better hope for your sake that its not.

With utter disrespect,

Ron

Snape chuckled. He never knew that boy could be so Slytherin. If he had known, he might not have been so hard on him. He smirked as he remembered the enraged look on the Headmaster's face. He didn't know about the theft, but he wasn't surprised. He was enjoying the thought that a couple of teenagers finally got one over on Dumbledore. He lifted his snifter and silently saluted the two young men. He couldn't wait until Potter invited him over.

This has to be one of the best days ever, he thought as he sipped his scotch. I shall be looking forward to seeing what else those two young men pull off. He smiled wickedly at the thought. There just might be some hope for the Wizarding World yet.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Several days later found the two young men sitting in the den reading. The days had been good for Harry. His health had continued to improve and he had filled out some, thanks to the potions and the food that Dobby had forced Harry to eat.

Harry put down the book he was reading. He sighed and looked around the room. He noticed Ron was snickering over an article he was reading in Quidditch Weekly. Harry shook his head in amusement then sighed again.

Ron looked over at him and frowned, concerned. "You alright there, Harry?"

"I'm bored," he said.

Ron looked at Harry warily. He knew what happened when Harry got bored. Bad things happened, well bad for him. Ron still shuddered at the time Harry decided he wanted to bungee, no bungee jump from Gryffindor tower. The detentions they had gotten hadn't been worth the terror of watching his best friend jump with nothing but a rope holding onto him. It had proven something he had always known -- Muggles were crazy.

"No, whatever you're thinking, no! There will no flinging yourself off the castle tower, there will be no trying to ride the unicorns, and there will be no forcing a love potion on Mrs. Norris so that she would fall in love with Fang. I still have that scar, thank you very much. There will be no painting Snape's office pink with yellow polka dots just because you liked some song and you wanted to see if you could. Snape terrorized us for weeks over that because you couldn't stop grinning. He knew it was you. You couldn't even lie to him without grinning," Ron said to a pouting Harry.

"But, Ron," Harry whined, amusement dancing in his eyes.

"No!" Ron exclaimed. "As your caretaker I am putting my foot down on this." He gave Harry a stern look and Harry sighed mournfully.

The messy-haired man was quiet for a few minutes. "How about," he started, but Ron interrupted him.

"No," he snapped.

"But you didn't let me finish what I was going to say," Harry pouted, his eyes wide with mock hurt.

"I don't care, no," Ron said sternly.

Harry looked at Ron intently then sighed sadly. "You've become your mother, Ron."

Ron's eyes opened wide, his expression shocked. "What in the hell do you mean by that?"

Harry's chin quivered, and his eyes filled with sadness. "You never let me have any fun. You don't even listen to me," he sniffed despondently, his expression hurt.

Ron opened his mouth then closed it. He hated the comparison to his soon to be ex-mother. He watched the sad expression on his best friend and caved. Damn it! So much for being strong. "All right Harry, what to you want to do?" he asked, resigned to his fate.

Harry perked up instantly and smiled brightly at him. "How about we go to Gringotts and check out my finances?" he inquired. "I want to know why Dumbledore was using my money. If we use what we find against him, then we could keep him off our backs for a while. I don't believe that it will deter him for long, but something is better than nothing," he mused thoughtfully.

Harry noticed Ron was shifting around in his chair nervously, and he stared at his friend curiously. "What's wrong, Ron?"

Ron looked at him quickly, and then looked away. He cleared his throat nervously and ran his fingers through his bright red hair. "I, um... left a note for Dumbledore when we escaped from Hogwarts."

"Really? What did it say?" Harry asked, wondering what was making his friend so nervous.

Ron straightened and looked at Harry. "It wasn't much."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Ron," he said, exasperated, "tell me."

Ron stood up and reached into the pocket of his robe pulling out a parchment. He walked over to Harry and handed it to him. "I kept a copy because I figured you'd want to read it."

"And you carry it around with you?" Harry asked as he grabbed the note.

Ron shrugged. "I never knew when I was going to tell you about the letter I left with Winky. I figured you would want to read it instead of having me tell you. It loses something when I tell it," he replied.

Harry looked at him, amused, and unrolled the parchment and began to read. When he was done, he looked up at his nervous friend and began to snicker. He burst into outright when he saw the sheepish look on Ron's face. Harry held his sides, not able to breathe from laughing so hard. After a few minutes, he calmed down and shook his head. "Oh, Ron, that was great! I never knew you were so Slytherin."

Ron gaped at him, outraged. "I'm not Slytherin," he exclaimed heatedly.

Harry continued to chuckle. "Maybe not, but you're showing definite signs of Slytherin behavior. Cunning, deviousness, hints of power. You, my friend, are definitely becoming Slytherin," he explained.

Ron continued to look at his friend, but this time with a thoughtful expression. Harry was right. He had been devious and cunning by sending Dumbledore that note. He decided that way he had been treated over the last nineteen months were the cause for this change. He had been a Gryffindor through and through, and even though he'd had sneaky thoughts, he buried them. When he realized that Gryffindors were nothing more than backstabbing sycophants, he

began to listen to that small voice in the back of his head. Now he no longer ignored it. If it made him a little more Slytherin, well, so be it.

"You know, you're right, Harry. I do have some Slytherin qualities, and if it keeps you safe then I'm alright with it," he stated. Ron looking over at his friend, his expression fierce. "Nothing will stop me from protecting you, not even the thought of being Slytherin."

Harry gave Ron an affectionate smile. "I know, Ron. I feel the same way." He watched as Ron blushed with pleasure. "Now, about the note, have you really done everything you said you did?"

Ron snorted, amused. "Hardly. I haven't had the time."

Harry grinned at Ron wickedly. "Oh, Merlin, Ron, this note isn't even true, but Dumbledore won't do anything because he doesn't know and he can't take a chance on losing his reputation or his magic." Harry thought for a few seconds before glancing at Ron slyly. "Well, my friend, I say we make it true. We need to go to Gringotts and look over my finances. I'm sure we can find the proof we need to blackmail Dumbledore until the time comes that I decide to let the public know about our beloved Headmaster," Harry said with a sneer.

"You're going to give the Ministry the evidence?" Ron asked curiously.

Harry nodded. "Eventually. Dumbledore is going to pay for his manipulations, even if it's that last thing I do in this world. Until then, we need a way to keep him quiet and out of our way. I still need to develop my powers then..."

Ron interrupted Harry and asked, "Develop your powers? What do you mean by that?"

He paused mid-sentence and frowned at Ron thoughtfully. "Oh, that's right. I haven't had time to tell you. While I was in Azkaban, I went through my magical inheritance. My power has increased a lot. I feel the magic buzzing through my body. I found out that I can do wandless magic. I practiced it to pass the time in Azkaban. I also spontaneously transformed into my animagus form while I was there.

Not that it really did me any good in Azkaban. It helped a little when it came to the Dementor spell, but that's all."

"Bloody hell, Harry. You can do magic in Azkaban?" Ron asked, his expression awed.

Harry looked at Ron, confused. "Yeah, so what? It's not as if I could do it all the time. I was very tired after I practiced. I did notice that it got easier the longer I practiced, but it was still hard."

"SO WHAT!" Ron yelled excitedly. "Harry, there are magic suppression wards surrounding Azkaban. You're not supposed to be able to do magic in Azkaban, period, wandless or otherwise. No wonder you were so tired. You circumvented the wards. Merlin, Harry, do you know what this means?" Ron asked.

Harry looked at his friend, confused, still not able to understand why Ron was so excited. Obviously, the wards weren't very good at suppressing magic. "No, Ron, tell me. What does this mean?"

"You're powerful. I bet you are even more powerful than Dumbledore or You Know Who. They can't do magic in Azkaban," Ron explained.

"What do you mean Voldemort can't do magic in Azkaban?" Harry asked. "He used it when he got Malfoy and his other followers out."

Ron shook his head. "Only after he brought down the wards. There are no records of any witch or wizard ever being able to use magic in Azkaban. Don't you understand, 'the power he knows not', this could be it," the redhead said with some excitement.

Harry looked at Ron and arched an eyebrow in disbelief. "I thought you believed that the prophecy was crap."

Ron looked at Harry sheepishly. "I could be wrong," he admitted.

Harry snickered then looked thoughtful. He looked at the table next to his chair and grabbed his teacup, waving his hand and nearly dropped it when it transfigured into a mouse on the first try. He gaped at the mouse, disbelief written on his face.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Ron asked.

Harry glanced up at Ron, his eyes wide. "In Azkaban, this would have taken at least ten to twelve tries before being transfigured. Now though, I barely got the thought out before it transfigured. Merlin, Ron, I have power." Harry looked down at the mouse, awed. His head snapped suddenly and he gave Ron a wicked smile. "I have power, Ron; lots of power. I'm more powerful than Voldemort and when the time comes, I'll be able to take care of him. Not only that, but I have more power than Dumbledore. Do you know what that means?"

Ron thought for a second before smirking. "Dumbledore is going down."

Harry chuckled wickedly. "Oh yeah," he said with excitement.

"Wicked," Ron breathed then paused. He glanced at Harry warily and asked, "You're not going to kill him are you?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Fine, ruin my wicked moment. No, Ron, I'm not going to kill him. I'm just going to take him out of his position of power. His time has come and gone. He needs to answer for everything he's done for this stupid war with Voldemort. If he manipulated me, left me with abusive relatives, and stole my money, then what else has he done to others?"

"Damn, Harry. He could have been doing this for years," Ron remarked.

"Yeah. I wonder if he has something on Snape," Harry mused thoughtfully.

Ron opened his mouth to insult the Potions Master then closed it quickly. He looked thoughtful for a moment before replying, "That would explain why he told us to leave. Maybe he has personal knowledge of Dumbledore's manipulation."

Harry nodded. "We'll have to ask him when he comes for tea at the end of the week. I did promise him I would invite him. Crap, I need to invite him. I need an owl," Harry said.

"What about Hedwig?" Ron asked.

Harry shook his head. "Too well known," he explained.

"Have Dobby take it. He can get inside of Hogwarts without being seen. He is a house-elf after all," Ron mentioned.

"Good idea, Ron. Dobby," Harry called out.

The house-elf appeared in front of Harry. "Yes, Harry Potter? What may Dobby do for you?" he asked.

Harry gazed at him with surprise. Dobby was wearing actual clothes. In fact, he was wearing a uniform. The tunic was made of a scarlet cloth and it had a high neck collar, which was made of green velvet. The cuffs were also made of green velvet and had gold gryphons embroidered on them. There were golden buttons lining the front and it looked crisp and clean. Dobby was also wearing tightly fitted black pants with patented leather black boots that went up to mid-calf. He was standing straight and gazed at Harry fearlessly. Harry noticed that the yellow glow that surrounded Dobby was stronger and it had more white scattered throughout it. This wasn't the old Dobby. This house-elf was proud and free. Harry smiled at him with delight.

"I like the uniform, Dobby. It's good to see you wearing smart looking clothes," Harry said.

Dobby beamed up at Harry. "Dobby likes the castle. Dobby is surrounded by other free house-elves, who wear clothes and have their own rooms. They are paid every week and allowed to have children without their master's permission," the house-elf replied excitedly.

Harry looked at him, shocked. "You needed permission to have children?"

Dobby nodded his head sadly and explained, "Yes. Master Malfoy didn't want to have too many house-elves. Only the most obedient could have children." Dobby's ears drooped down and he had tears in his large eyes. "Dobby was never good enough. Dobby could never have children. Dobby asked evil Master every year for thirty years, but Master's always said no. Dobby always wanted children. Evil Wizard Malfoy got tired of Dobby's request and killed Dobby's mate, Emmy. Dobby stopped asking after that," he stated mournfully.

Harry looked over at Ron, horrified by what he had heard. He noticed that Ron looked angry and his face turned red. He shook his head at Ron and the redhead nodded in understanding. He would have to wait until Dobby left before yelling.

Harry got out of his chair and knelt down next to Dobby. The house-elf looked at him surprise. Harry smiled. "You're free now, Dobby. Free to do whatever you want. You can stay here, find a new mate, have children, get paid, wear clothes, and live the life of a free elf. You no longer have to answer to anyone. If you want, you can also leave and travel around the world, see the sights. I want you to be happy, Dobby. You're my friend and I'm angry about what Malfoy did to you. I picked you as my secret keeper because I trust you to keep my secrets. You have always been there for me and if I can ever repay that then let me know and I will do what I can."

Dobby looked at him, tears in his eyes. "Harry Potter is a good wizard. Harry Potter saved Dobby from a life of pain and slavery. Harry Potter has already done everything that Dobby has ever wanted. Dobby will never betray Harry Potter's trust. Harry Potter is Dobby's friend."

Harry smiled at the house-elf gently. "And Dobby is Harry Potter's friend."

Dobby smiled brightly and leaned forward, giving Harry Potter a hug. He pulled back and looked over at Ron. "Wheezy is also Dobby's friend. Wheezy takes care of Harry Potter. Wheezy is a true friend of Harry Potter's."

"Indeed I am, Dobby," Ron remarked with a smile.

Dobby looked back at Harry and asked, "What may Dobby do for Harry Potter?"

"I need some parchment, a quill, and some ink. I have a letter to write. Can you still get into Hogwarts without being seen?" Harry asked, his mind racing with thoughts.

Dobby nodded his head vigorously. "Hogwarts ignores house-elves. Wards do not stop house-elves from leaving or entering Hogwarts."

"I wonder if You Know Who knows that," Ron pondered thoughtfully.

"Probably, but to him it would be like sending a dog to do a human's job, no offense, Dobby. I can't see Voldemort even lowering himself to talk to the house-elves let alone sending them out to do a job," Harry said.

"True," Ron replied.

Harry looked back at Dobby. "Once I write my letter, I want you to take it to Professor Snape at Hogwarts," he requested. "Make sure no one sees you. It's a secret and I don't want Dumbledore to know that I have written Snape."

Dobby looked at him strangely and asked, "Harry Potter is writing Professor Snape? Why? Professor Snape hates Harry Potter."

"True, but sometimes there are more things going on with a person than you can see. Remember, Professor Snape let us leave Hogwarts without raising any alarms. I did promise him I would have him over to tea. Snape may be many things, but he is honorable, in his own way. I think I might enjoy getting to know Snape this time around; the snarky, greasy haired git." Harry heard Ron snickering in the background.

Dobby nodded in understanding. "Dobby will get your things now." He disappeared and Harry turned and looked at Ron. "As much as I hate to admit it, Granger had the right of it when she started that S.P.E.W. crap. I never realized how bad it could be for a house-elf. Maybe

when I take over the Wizarding World, I'll free all the house-elves," he mused thoughtfully.

Ron looked at Harry with a startled expression. "You're going to take over the Wizarding World?" he asked.

Harry grinned at Ron wickedly. "Sure, why not? I'm bored," he said with mischievously.

Ron groaned and rolled his eyes. "Merlin, Harry, I thought you were serious."

Harry laughed at his best friend's antics. "I may have power, but trust me, running the Wizarding World is the last thing I want to do. However, I could be that dark, mysterious figure behind all the momentous changes that occurs in the Wizarding World. No one will ever have to know that Harry Potter is in charge," Harry said as he thought on the idea for a few minutes. "Nah, too much work. You know how lazy I am. Maybe I can take over the Wizarding World and you can run it."

Ron laughed at Harry and said, "Sure, we can have Quidditch matches every day and no homework ever. Instead of three meals a day at Hogwarts, any student can have access to the kitchens. There would be no Potions classes ever and Divination would be banned from the Wizarding World forever."

Harry started to laugh and bounced in his chair with excitement. "Yeah, and bungee jumping would be the new Hogwarts sport."

Ron shuddered in horror and exclaimed, "Hell no!"

Harry laughed at Ron's horrified expression. He remembered that when he had jumped off the Gryffindor Tower, Ron had screamed like a girl. He shook his head affectionately at his friend.

Dobby appeared in front of him and gave him the requested items. Harry thanked him, got up, and settled at the table to write out the note. When he finished it, he rolled it up and cast a spell on it so that

no one but Snape could read it. He gave it to Dobby. "Wait and see if he will respond." Dobby nodded, and then disappeared.

Harry looked over at Ron with a hopeful expression and asked, "So, Gringotts?"

Ron sighed with resignation. "Gringotts," he echoed.

Harry waited for Ron to get out of the chair before walking out of the room.

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Professor Snape was grading the second years' papers. He muttered with disgust at the pathetic answer one student had given him. He hated teaching. If he could, he would leave Hogwarts, but he had nowhere to go and he was bound to Dumbledore. He sighed, leaned back, and rubbed his head wearily.

He was happy that at least two people had escaped Dumbledore's control. The Headmaster had not been in a good mood since he found out that Weasley had left Hogwarts with Harry and Dobby in tow. Dumbledore had informed the teachers that Ron, Harry and Dobby had all left Hogwarts, but he never mentioned why. He had overheard a house-elf comment about the temper tantrum the Headmaster had thrown in his office. Snape smirked at the thought of unflappable Headmaster throwing his things and breaking them in a fit of rage.

He knew that the Headmaster had a temper. Not many did, but Snape had seen it once before when the Headmaster had found out Sirius Black had escaped Azkaban. Snape didn't understand why he had raged about Black's escape, but after the reading Ron's note this morning, he was beginning to get an idea.

Dumbledore had been stealing money from Potter for years and Weasley had found out. He had closed the accounts and now Dumbledore could no longer get at the money. The Potions Master couldn't understand why the Headmaster needed the money. The Dumbledore family was rich beyond thought. The family had more

money than the Malfoys. Snape shook his head; maybe I should nose around and see what I can find out.

Snape was startled out of his thoughts by a house-elf appearing before him. He glanced at the house-elf in surprise. He had never seen a less subservient house-elf; one that was actually wearing clothes.

Looking at the house-elf curiously he asked, "Can I help you?"

"I is Dobby. Dobby is Harry Potter's house-elf. Dobby is bringing Professor Snape a note from Harry Potter." He walked over to Snape and held out a parchment. "Dobby is to wait for a response."

Snape took the parchment from the strange house-elf and opened it.

Acerbus,

As promised, I'm inviting you over for tea. If you agree, then I'll send you a portkey on Saturday at 11:00. The portkey will take you to a safe place and you'll be met by my house-elf, who will take you to my home.

My house-elf will know if you're being followed, or if there's a tracking spell on you, which he will remove.

I'm trusting you Acerbus, don't let me down.

Sincerely,

Bolt

Snape snorted at the name Potter had given him. Dark indeed, he mused. He picked up his quill and wrote his response.

Bolt,

Dark indeed. I understand your concerns. You have not misplaced your trust in me.

I will see you on Saturday.

Acerbus

He put down his quill and rolled up the parchment. He got up and stepped around the desk. He began to give the note to the house-elf when he pulled it back. Dobby looked at him curiously.

"I was wondering if you could answer a question for me," Snape asked.

"Depending on Professor Snape's question. Dobby will not betray Harry Potter," Dobby replied sternly.

Snape waved away the comment. "No, nothing like that. I just wanted to know if Potter was taking his potions. Is he feeling better?" he asked gruffly.

Dobby nodded his head vigorously. "Dobby or Wheezy makes sure that Harry Potter takes his potions. Harry Potter grumbles, but takes them. Harry Potter is doing better."

Snape gave the note to Dobby and said, "Good, good."

He watched as Dobby hid the note in his pocket and looked back up at Snape. "Professor Snape will not try to hurt Harry Potter will he?"

Snape shook his head in denial. "No, I am not going to hurt him or Weasley either."

"Wheezy not like that name. Wheezy is getting a new name," Dobby said.

Snape arched his eyebrow and asked, "Would you happen to know what that name is? Can you tell me?"

Dobby looked at him intently for a second before saying, "Harry Potter has given him the name of Black."

Snape snorted, amused. Oh, there are going to be some pissed off people when they find out. He heard a noise from the outside of his office and cursed. He grabbed a vial of Phoenix Tears that had been sitting on his desk and gave it to Dobby. "Play along," he hissed softly.

Dobby nodded in understanding and suddenly looked fearful. He began to quiver and Snape took a moment to admire the acting job of the house-elf. He would have to ask Potter about this strange house-elf.

He heard the door open softly and he leaned over the fearful house-elf. "Tell me where they are, or else I will make what Malfoy did to you seem like child's play. Tell me where Weasley and Potter are!" he roared.

Dobby began to wail frightfully. "Dobby cannot say. Dobby gave his word. Wheezy wanted Dobby to steal Phoenix Tears. Dobby not knows why," the blubbering house-elf cried.

"Severus, what's going on here?" Dumbledore asked with an edge to his voice.

Severus glanced at the Headmaster and sneered. "I caught this house-elf going through my potions ingredients. He had a vial of Phoenix Tears in his hands when I found him. When I questioned him, he told me his name was Dobby. Isn't that the house-elf who left with Potter and Weasley?" Snape asked.

The Headmaster looked enraged at Weasley's name, but quickly wiped the expression off his face. Snape smirked internally, who would have ever thought that he would respect a Weasley, but the boy had done something no one else had. He had outsmarted the Headmaster. It gave Snape all kinds of pleasure just thinking about it.

"Yes, he is. Have you found anything out?" Dumbledore asked, glaring at Dobby.

Snape shook his head and look at the house-elf with disgust. "This pathetic creature won't tell me a thing. Only that Weasley wanted the Phoenix Tears. I don't know what use it would be to him since he

can't brew a potion to save his life." Actually, Weasley had improved in Potions quite a lot in his last year. He had been shocked when Weasley had actually passed his OWLS with a high enough grade to get into his NEWT class. With all that had happened, Weasley had thrown himself into his studies and passed the class, his grade slightly lower than the Grangers and Malfoys.

The Headmaster stalked over to the quivering house-elf. "Tell me where Harry and Ron are," he demanded coldly.

The house-elf flinched and backed away from the powerful figure. "Dobby not knows, Dobby can't tell you, Dobby..." Dobby said, cringing in fright.

Dumbledore cut off the quivering elf and said, "Dobby will receive the same fate as his previous mate if he doesn't tell me what I want to know. Now tell me where they are."

The house-elf stopped backing up and looked down at the floor. The Headmaster looked at him in satisfaction; he knew that bringing up Dobby's dead mate would get him what he wanted.

Snape looked at the small house-elf in hidden sympathy. He knew what was likely to have happened to Dobby's mate. Many wizards had no qualms about separating or even killing mated house-elves. It was just a sad fact of the Wizarding World.

"Now, Dobby if you would be so kind..." Dumbledore started only to be interrupted.

Dobby straightened up and looked at the Headmaster in the eye. "No! Dobby will not tell you a thing, Headmaster. You have no rights over me any more. Dobby is not your house-elf," Dobby growled and Snape stared at the house-elf, shocked. What the hell just happened? This was not typical house-elf behavior.

The Headmaster stared at him, bewildered. He hadn't expected that. Every wizard knew that the house-elves were subservient and forced to serve. Even the free house-elves were too downtrodden to be anything other than submissive.

Dumbledore growled. "I will not tolerate this behavior from a house-elf. You will tell me what I want to know, or you will suffer the consequences." The Headmaster pulled out his wand and threw a cutting curse at the house-elf.

The house-elf stood there calmly, watching as the curse got closer. As it neared Dobby, a bright light surrounded the house-elf and the curse bounced off, flying towards the Headmaster. The old wizard ducked to dodge the curse and glanced at the house-elf, shock written on his face. That wasn't supposed to happen.

Dobby walked over to the Headmaster and snapped his fingers. Dumbledore flew across the room and slammed into the wall, an invisible force holding him there. Dobby looked at him, and to Snape's amazement, Dobby smirked.

"Dobby is a free elf. Dobby has given Wheezy and Harry Potter an oath of protection. Dobby's magic grows and Dobby doesn't need stupid stick for it to work. Dobby dislikes the Headmaster. The Headmaster tried to trick Wheezy and Harry Potter. Dobby protects them. Dobby is saying that if Headmaster tries to hurt them again, the Headmaster will be nothing but a greasy spot on the ground when Dobby is done with him," the small house-elf growled. "Dobby is leaving now and Dobby will be sure to tell Wheezy all about the Headmaster's treachery." With another snap, the Headmaster's head slammed against the wall and he was knocked unconscious. Dobby looked at the still figure, satisfied.

Dobby turned and looked at the fascinated and shocked Potions Master. "Dobby enjoyed that."

Snape stared at the house-elf, then looked over at Dumbledore. "Yes, I can see that. You could've left at any time, why did you stay? Why did you pretend?" he asked curiously.

Dobby grinned ferally. "Dobby wanted to make a point," he replied. The small house-elf looked over at the unconscious Headmaster and smirked. "Point made." Turning back to Snape, he said, "Dobby will

be keeping the Phoenix Tears. Dumbly would be suspicious if they were still here." He gave the stunned man a wink then disappeared.

The room was quiet. Snape stared at the spot where the house-elf had stood, unable to comprehend what he had witnessed. The spell that had been holding the unconscious Headmaster dissolved and he fell to the floor.

Snape smirked, relishing the sight, before sighing. He walked over to the Dumbledore, pulled out his wand, and pointed it at the old wizard. "Ennervate," he muttered.

Dumbledore came to and looked are dazedly before remembering what had happened. He sat up, his eyes cold, his expression furious. Snape leaned down to help him up, but Dumbledore shook off his hands, got up off the floor.

"Where did he go?" Dumbledore asked, his eyes snapping with rage.

"I tried to Stupefy him, but he disappeared as soon as he knocked you out. I was unable to get a tracking spell on him. I'm sorry," Snape replied meekly.

Dumbledore sneered at him. "Incompetent fool," he spat. He took a deep breath and his rage calmed somewhat. He glared at Snape. "I have had it," he growled. "I will not be out smarted by two boys and a pathetic house-elf. You will find out where they are Snape, or I will have your ass thrown in Azkaban so fast your head will spin. Don't forget that I own you. It's about time you start earning your keep."

The Headmaster gave him one last glare and stomped out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Snape stared at the wall, shaken. He knew that his life was over. He would not betray Potter or Weasley. He would do whatever he could to make sure that two young men stayed out of Dumbledore's clutches, even if it meant his life. At least I would be dying for something, he thought wearily. I need a drink.

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acerbus a -um bitter. Hence, of sounds, harsh; of looks, dark, gloomy; of speech or writing, bitter; of events, etc., painful, severe; of persons, morose; from the notion of unripeness, premature. Adv. acerbe, bitterly, harshly. LATIN

CHAPTER EIGHT

Harry stumbled out of the fireplace, irritated that he sucked a flooing. He straightened up, brushed off his robes, and turned to wait for Ron. A flash of green and Ron walked out of the fireplace. Harry frowned, feeling envy at the ease at which Ron flooed. He hated the fact that he couldn't floo very well; crappy entrances just didn't seem to suit the most powerful wizard in the Wizarding World. He smirked internally at that.

Ron looked around the inn and stopped when he saw the twins. Luckily, Ron and Harry had glamours on, or there would have been a problem. The redhead sneered in the twin's general direction. Out of all the family members, they had been the worst. The beatings the twins had given him had been vicious. When their father had finally put a stop to it, they began to prank him and destroyed his property. They were the ones he hated the most. It had devastated him when they had turned on him. He shook his head; it made him sympathize with Percy all the more. I wonder if I could get Percy to talk to me, he mused thoughtfully. I'll have to find out later.

"Hey, Ginger, let's go," Harry chirped cheerfully.

Ron scowled at him in mock anger. "Don't call me that Bolt."

"Sure thing, Ginger," Harry replied, snickering.

Ron rolled his eyes and followed Harry out of the inn. They reached the brick wall and Harry tapped it with his wand. The wall parted and they began to walk down the street of Diagon Alley.

"Remind me later that I need to get another owl. We need one that isn't recognizable. We can't use Dobby for everything," Harry said.

Ron nodded. "Gotcha," he answered.

They ambled down the street, quietly enjoying the sunshine. Harry hadn't really been out in the sun since before he was thrown into Azkaban. He enjoyed feeling the warmth of the sun on his face, the gently blowing breeze rifling through his hair. He looked around

curiously, glancing over the people that were enjoying the warm summer day. He noticed that nothing had changed since his imprisonment. There were no new shops and it looked as if none of the shops had gone out of business.

They finally reached Gringotts and stopped. The large white building gleamed in the sunlight. Walking up the steps, they paused in front of entrance doors. The giant doors opened into a large foyer with golden walls -- real gold, not paint -- and a rounded ceiling that was painted with a large scene of the Goblin wars. The goblins guarding the inner doors looked fierce. Harry nodded to the goblins, who looked at them strangely, then entered the main room of Gringotts. The large room was filled with wizards and goblins. There were guards lining the walls, watching the wizards and witches intently, their hands resting on the large swords sitting against their hips.

"Who's in charge of my accounts this time?" Harry asked curiously.

"Ghistpok," Ron said.

"Is he polite?" Harry inquired.

Ron shrugged. "More like indifferent," he stated.

Harry nodded, frowning. "Well, if he's too indifferent I may just have to change goblins," he growled.

Ron smirked at Harry. "That'll sure piss him off wouldn't it?" he quipped.

Harry shrugged his shoulder carelessly. "Ask me if I care," he spat out. "He let that stupid old man steal from me without saying a word and you think I care about his feelings? Not hardly."

They walked up to the counter and Harry smiled at the goblin. "I would like to see Ghistpok, please?"

"May I ask what this regarding?" the surly goblin asked.

"Why, money, of course," Harry said slyly, ignoring Ron's chuckles.

"Yes, but whose?" the goblin asked, frowning.

"Well, mine, obviously," Harry replied innocently.

The goblin growled, irritated and demanded, "Can I tell him who is asking for him?"

"Yes," Harry said shortly.

A few seconds went by before the goblin cracked. "Well?" the goblin asked stridently.

"Well what?" Harry asked with a confused look on his face.

"I need a name!" the goblin demanded.

Harry looked shocked, leaned forward, and asked, "You mean you don't have one? Oh Merlin, that is so sad. Well, haven't you picked one out for yourself? I personally like the name Susie. I think that's what I'll call you. Don't you feel better now that you have a name, Susie?"

The goblin screamed with irritation, "I need to know your name so that I can tell Ghistpok, you stupid wizard." There was silence in the bank and wizards, witches, and goblins all turned to look towards the screaming goblin.

"Well, why didn't you say that in the first place, Susie," Harry asked with a hurt expression.

"I did."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did."

"Nope."

"Yes."

"No."

"Yes, I did!"

"Nope, I'm pretty sure you didn't."

"Ahhhhhh! Tell me your damn name you stupid, pathetic wizard," Susie finally screamed angrily.

Harry gasped with shock and took a step backwards. He looked at the goblin warily and exclaimed, "Well, I say, that was awfully rude of you."

The goblin just gaped at the stupid wizard. He heard a throat clear behind him and stiffened. He looked around and realized that every single person in the bank was staring at them.

Harry didn't know that a goblin could blush. Huh, you learn something new everyday, he mused thoughtfully.

"Is there a problem here, Glixx?" the other goblin inquired politely.

Harry gasped, his expression outraged. "You lied to me. You do have a name. I was kind enough to share with you my favorite name and you already have one. Is this the type of service goblins offer nowadays? Do you lie to all your customers?" he asked suspiciously.

Glixx looked trapped between embarrassment and anger. "If you'd just told me your name, this could have all been avoided."

Harry sniffed with indignation. "I can't tell you my name now. You lied to me. You don't have that honor." Harry looked at the other goblin. "I'm here to see Ghispok and this goblin is giving me a hard time. He lied to me about not having a name, and then he yelled at me. I didn't do anything," he said sadly, with a sniffle.

The second goblin stared at him wide eyed. It looked as if the wizard was going to cry. "Please come with me. I will take you to see Ghispok," the goblin responded in a rush.

Harry smiled at the goblin brightly. "Thank you. What's your name? You do have a name, don't you?" he asked suspiciously. He turned and gave Glixx a glare. Turning back to goblin, he smiled at him expectantly.

The goblin smiled at him nervously and replied, "My name is Biletooth."

Harry blinked at the name for a minute. "I like it. It's better than Susie any day."

Biletooth nodded, turned, and began walking. "If you would follow me, I will take you to see Ghistpok."

Harry and Ron began to follow the goblin. They reached an office door and Biletooth opened it. He waved them into the office. "Ghistpok will be with you in a moment." With a nod, he closed the door hurriedly.

Once the door closed, Ron began to laugh hysterically while Harry just sat there looking smug. Ron was holding his stomach, tears falling from his eyes. "Susie...oh Merlin...I can't believe you called him Susie. You had that goblin so confused."

Harry shrugged nonchalantly and said, "I was bored." He grinned when Ron started howling with laughter.

Ghistpok walked in and looked at the laughing wizard in bewilderment. He closed the door and walked to his desk. He glanced at the other wizard and noticed that he had a smug look on his face. He looked at him intently before smiling. "Susie?"

Ron started to howl again and Harry laughed at the amused look on the goblin's face. He had a feeling he might like this goblin if he could justify why he let Dumbledore steal from him.

After a few minutes, Ron calmed down, wiping the tears from his eyes. Ghistpok looked at the two wizards in front of him. "How may I help you, Mr. Potter?" he inquired.

Harry looked at him, shocked. "How did you know who I was?"

"There are wards around this office. I can see through any glamour, metamorphagus, and polyjuice potions. It is for the safety of the bank. We wouldn't want a wizard to lie about who he is to steal some money now would we?"

Harry sat up and glared at the goblin. "Speaking of stealing, I want to know why I wasn't told about Dumbledore stealing my money."

The goblin got up from his desk and went what looked like a Muggle filing cabinet. He muttered a spell, then opened a drawer. He rummaged through it and pulled out a file. He slammed the drawer and walked back to the desk. He sat down, placed the file on the desk, and opened it. He glanced at Harry, an unreadable expression on his face.

"Albus Dumbledore is the executor of your estates. As the executor, he has access to your accounts. By law, he is able to open one account in your estate. The account cannot exceed over a 1,000 galleons a month. If a wizard happens to open more than one account under different names for different reasons, then he could gain a good amount of money and still be within the limits of the law," Ghistpok explained.

Harry growled. "Are you saying that Dumbledore took my money and I have no way of making him pay it back?"

"Technically, yes, but Dumbledore made two mistakes. One, when he opened up the accounts he had to sign the papers. Since he didn't think anyone would dig deeply in your estate, he wasn't too concerned about hiding it. He signed his name on the documents, giving proof of his theft. Therefore, he can be liable for the rest of the accounts he was stealing from."

"And the second mistake?" Harry asked curiously.

"He left me in charge of the account," Ghistpok replied smugly. "I dislike theft; it goes against everything that I am. I am an odd goblin

since I can't tolerate greed. He believed that if he bribed me, I would hide the paperwork. He was wrong. Since I couldn't do anything personally to bring it your attention, as you were underage at the time, I made a copy of every single document that he ever signed. There is proof in this file of his theft. There is enough evidence here to put Dumbledore away, even by your Ministry laws."

Harry gave the goblin a feral grin. "Yes!" he hissed.

"If your eyes begin to turn red, I'm gone," Ron stated warily as he stared at his best friend.

Harry's shoulders slump glumly. He turned and smacked his friend. "Why do you have to ruin the moment?"

Ron grinned at him. "It's what I do!" he replied cheerfully.

Harry looked back at Ghistpok, a thoughtful look on his face. "I want several copies of those papers made. I don't want what you have to be only copy."

Ghistpok nodded in understanding. "Where shall I send them?"

"I'll have my house-elf come and pick them up," Harry explained.

Ghistpok looked at Harry, surprised. "A house-elf? I didn't think wizards used them for more than drudgery," the goblin remarked.

Harry sat up and glared at the goblin. "Dobby is a free elf. He is able to make his own decisions and I trust him implicitly."

Ghistpok looked at him intently, a shrewd look on his face. "Plus, no other wizards would think of looking at a house-elf. They consider them no more than a nuisance that have no mind of their own."

"Most house-elves are bound to Wizarding families and their magic suppressed. Dobby doesn't have such restraints and his magic is free. He has become quite aggressive in his protection of me," Harry explained.

"Interesting. I shall look forward to meeting him, then," Ghistpok commented with a smile.

"I have question," Ron piped up.

"Yes?" Ghistpok asked.

"How much money did Dumbledore steal?"

Harry looked at the goblin curiously. "I'd also like to know."

The goblin looked down at the file. "He opened twenty accounts in the Potter estate, then there were ten in the Black estate. The Potter accounts he used for seventeen years and the Black accounts were used for three, so that totals up to 4,440,000 galleons."

Harry was quiet a moment before asking, "What in the hell did he need the money for?"

Ghistpok looked down at the file. "Several of the accounts were opened under Hogwarts, several were under Dumbledore, and several were under something call the Order of the Phoenix, and the rest were under various other names."

Harry looked at him in disbelief. "Hogwarts is paid for by the Ministry and the school board, why would he need money to run the school?"

"He doesn't necessarily need to use it for the school. He could simply withdraw the money and use it for himself. He just needed the name to open the account," Ghistpok said.

Harry sighed wearily and said, "Merlin."

"Harry?" Ron asked in concern.

Harry shook his head and explained, "I'm fine. It's just overwhelming and frustrating to know that he was doing this. Why? He has money; his family is richer than the Malfoys, so why does he need my money?"

The goblin looked shifty for a second then said, "Actually, the Dumbledore estate is penniless."

Harry looked at him, shocked. "What?" he asked.

"The Dumbledore estate has steadily been losing money over the last hundred years. The Headmaster used what he had left in the last war with You Know Who," Ghistpok explained.

Harry frowned thoughtfully for a moment before saying, "He must have used it to finance the Order."

"The death of your parents must have seemed like a godsend," Ron said suddenly, his eyebrows furrowed in thought.

"What?" Harry asked, confused.

Ron looked at him, his expression serious. "Think about it. The man has no money, but your parents die and you need an executor. Your family is stinking rich, Harry. The money Dumbledore stole is but a smidgen of what you have. You have so much coming in from businesses, Wizard and Muggle, Muggle stocks and real estate that you wouldn't have noticed the missing money. With all that money, no wonder he decided to steal from you. It's not as if anyone was around to stop him. Who would believe that the wise Leader of the Light would steal from a baby?"

"Just how rich am I? I've never had a chance to look over my estate," Harry said.

Ron snorted, amused. "You're richer than Merlin himself."

"Thanks Ron, that was just vague enough," Harry said with a wry grin.

Ron smirked at him. "You're welcome. Glad I could help."

Ghistpok cleared his throat, gaining the attention of the two wizards. Looking at a parchment in front of him, he said, "A quick review, you have over 10 billion galleons to date, with more being added daily. You have ownership of over 100 Muggle businesses and 50

Wizarding businesses. Some of the ownerships date over hundreds of years. You have stock in several big name businesses in the Muggle world. You have 30 different homes and several buildings, which you rent out. You also have over a million galleons worth of jewelry in your vault. You must understand that this is just the Potter vault. There is more in the Black estate."

Harry just stared at him in disbelief before glancing over at Ron. "Merlin, I knew I had money, but wow, not this much. I don't have to take over the Wizarding World, I can just buy it," he said, his expression dazed. Ron chuckled and Ghistpok smiled.

Harry looked back over to the goblin and asked, "What happens when Ron takes the Black name in the Emancipation Rite?"

"As a member of the family, he will have access to the Black estate," Ghistpok replied. "While the Blacks were not as rich as the Potters, they were close. The richest and most powerful families in the Wizarding world are the Potters, the Blacks, the Dumbledores, the Bones, the Laceys, the Crouches, the Notts, and the Malfoys."

Harry looked over at the dazed Ron and grinned. "Well, it looks like you're stinking rich also."

"Yeah," Ron said absently.

Ghistpok looked at Ron and asked, "When have you scheduled your rite?"

"I haven't yet. Dumbledore was supposed to take care of that though now that I think of it; it might not be a good idea," Ron explained.

Ghistpok looked at them thoughtfully before saying, "Not many wizards know this, but by law, goblins are able to do the rite for wizards. You can bypass all the 'red tape' I think that is what the Muggles call it, and have it done here. Then we can file the documents with the Ministry and it's legal and final. It will be finished before anyone can interfere. It's often done in times of adoption when a family member wants another to receive an inheritance."

Ron and Harry looked over at each other then grinned wickedly. They turned back to the goblin. "We would like for you to do the rite."

Ron started to snicker. He looked at Harry and said, "This is going to piss Dumbledore off so bad." Harry laughed and the goblin smiled.

"Very well, I will prepare for the rite. If you would wait here, please." Ghistpok got out of the chair and walked to the door. He opened it and left, closing the door behind him.

Ron grinned at Harry before saying, "Dumbledore can't hold this against me."

"Yeah, I wouldn't put it past Dumbledore to somehow delay the rite," Harry said with a frown.

"Um... Think we can do the Blood Rite here, too? Get it all done in one go?" Ron asked curiously.

Harry shrugged. "Don't know. I guess we can always ask."

They sat in silence, each lost in their own thoughts. After fifteen minutes, Ghistpok came back in. He looked at the two young men and smiled at them. "We are ready."

They stood and Ron asked about the blood rite. "We also wanted to know if we can perform the Cognatio Frater here after the Emancipation Rite."

Ghistpok thought about it before saying, "You will have to rest after the Emancipation Rite since it takes a great amount of energy to change your magical signature. That's one reason it's rarely done. A couple of hours of rest and some food should help. The Blood Rite doesn't take a lot of energy as just enhances what you already have."

Ron looked at Harry, a question on his face. "Your choice."

Harry nodded his head and said, "Let's do it. Like you said, we can get this done in one go and nothing can interfere with it."

Ron looked at Ghistpok and nodded his head. "We'll do it," he said.

"Very well, follow me please."

They followed the goblin out of the office. They walked towards a door that was guarded a couple of fierce looking goblins. Ron looked at them warily while Harry just nodded to them. They waited, as the guards looked them up and down and then unlocked the door and let them through. They moved down a long hallway until they reached gold door. Ron stared at it in awe. "Blimey Harry, how many galleons do you think that door would make?"

"5,867,239 galleons," Ghistpok replied, overhearing the question..

"Wow."

Ghistpok knocked on the door and waited. It opened and they entered the room. Harry looked around and whistled, his expression delighted. The room was smaller than the main lobby of the bank, but still large. It was a round room; the floor was made of rose Italian marble. The walls were a mixture of uncut semi precious stones and stained concrete. The stones flickered with color from the torch flames placed around the room. The high vaulted rounded ceiling had a mural of the Goblin wars depicted on it. Sitting in the middle of the room was a small table surrounded by several large cushions.

"Welcome to the Room of Remembrance. It is not used much anymore except for certain rites. Off this room are smaller rooms that have beds that you may rest on later. There are wards around this room so that no magic can escape or be detected. I am unhappy to admit that it has been used in several dark arts rituals, but that was banned after Voldemort came into power. This is where your ritual will take place. You will sit on the cushions by the table so that if you feel weak for any reason, you don't have far to fall," the goblin said blandly.

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CHAPTER NINE

Ron gave him a sour look, but Ghistpok ignored it. "If you are ready, then please take a seat."

Harry sat on one side of the table and Ron on the other. He looked at the redhead, who was fidgeting nervously and asked, "You sure you want to do this?"

"Yeah, I'm just a little nervous, that's all." Harry nodded in understanding. "You think Sirius would have wanted this?" Ron asked.

Harry thought for a second then nodded before replying, "Yeah, I think he would. You know he loved anything to do with thumbing his nose at people, especially his family. Plus, he liked you as well."

"I wonder why he never went through this Rite," Ron wondered aloud.

Harry laughed before saying, "Probably couldn't stand the thought of leaving all that money."

"Yeah, that was the least of my concerns. Hell, when you think about it, I'm moving up in the world," Ron stated with a grin.

Harry snickered and watched as an old goblin came walking up to the table.

"I am Felkin, Shaman of my tribe. I will be performing the spell. Do you have a preference?" the goblin asked.

"Excuse me?" Ron asked. Harry looked at Felkin, confused.

"The spell can be done in four different languages; Latin, French, Italian, and German. Do you have a preference?"

"Does it make any difference?" Ron questioned, confused.

"Well, no it doesn't. Some of the families are picky about the language that is used," Felkin explained.

"Well, then, you choose whichever language you want," Ron suggested.

"Very well, I will go with French. I find the language fascinating. Do you wish to change your given names as well, Mr. Weasley?" Felkin asked.

"Mmmm ... I've never liked Bilius and it's a family name, so think I'll just go with Ron Black. Ron, not Ronald – no one ever calls me Ronald unless they're lecturing me," Ron grinned at the thought of his new name.

"Now, shall we begin?" asked Felkin.

Felkin stepped up to the table and picked up the cup that had been sitting there. He picked up the vial that was filled with a white liquid, opened it, and poured it in the cup. He put his bony hand over the cup and muttered a couple of spells. Harry watched in fascination as the liquid in the cup glowed briefly then changed colors. Where it had once been a cloudy white color, it was now a dark rich purple. For an instant, Harry could see a bright white aura surrounding the cup. He realized that his ability to see magical auras was kicking in.

Felkin gave the cup to Ron to drink. "This potion will help with the transition of magical signatures. It will ease the way."

Ron took the cup and swallowed it down. He looked at the cup in surprise. "That tastes good. Whoa, I feel really invigorated."

"Good, that means the potion is working," Felkin said.

The goblin knelt at the table and took Ron's hand. He closed his eyes and began to whisper softly. Harry suddenly yelped and covered his eyes. Ron looked at Harry, concerned. "Harry, you ok?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine, but Felkin is glowing. He's surrounded by a bright white light and it caught me off guard," Harry explained, blinking his eyes to get rid of the tears that the light had caused.

Felkin opened his eyes and looked at Harry with an apologetic expression. "I am sorry. I did not realize that you could see magical auras. I would have warned you otherwise. I had to release my magic in order to do the spell," he said.

Harry waved the apology aside. "It's all right, I was just surprised. Please continue."

Felkin nodded, closed his eyes, and began to whisper softly once more. Harry watched as the goblin glowed white and saw the light surround Ron, blanketing the red aura that he could now see surrounding Ron. Felkin opened his mouth and began to chant,

Par la magie que nous appellons,

Pour échanger quelque chose contre une autre chose,

Que cela soit fait par ma volonté,

Unis-toi à un nouveau nom,

Pour que cette magie sera coupée en morceaux,

Par ma volonté,

Remplace-là par une autre,

Libère-la des anciennes façons,

Remplace-la avec une nouvelle

Par ta volonté, par ma volonté,

Ne laisse plus cet enfant s'appeler Weasley,

Avec la permission de la nouvelle magie,

Remplace son nom par celui de Black,

Cet enfant ne sera plus connu sous le nom de Ronald Bilius Weasley,

Maintenant il le sera sous le nom de Ron Black,

Qu'il en soit fait ainsi, qu'il en soit fait ainsi, QU'IL EN SOIT FAIT AINSI!

Harry felt the magic rising in the room; his hair was standing up on the back of his neck. He noticed that a red ball of light had gathered above Ron then dissipated. An arrow of white light suddenly shot out of the room, through the ceiling, and past the wards. Harry was confused; he'd thought the wards were supposed to suppress the magic. He was probably seeing things. A few minutes later, Harry had to close his eyes as a bright blue and white light surrounded Ron. The light was suddenly gone and Harry cautiously opened his eyes.

He looked over at Ron and noticed that his aura had changed from red to blue. Harry assumed the Rite worked since Ron's aura color changed. He watched as Felkin slowly withdrew his aura from Ron. When it was finally gone, Felkin and Ron collapsed. Harry got up and hurried around the table. He knelt down and grabbed his friend, making sure that he was all right. He noticed a young goblin hurrying over to Felkin.

"Hey, you ok?" Harry asked, concerned.

Ron groaned weakly and his eyelids fluttered open. He stared at Harry a second. "Harry?" he asked.

"Yeah?"

"What happened?" the redhead asked, confused.

Harry smiled at his friend. "You went through the ritual. You kind of slumped over at the end. Remember, Ghispok told you that the ritual was going to take a lot out of you," he explained.

Ron nodded weakly and closed his eyes for a second. "Yeah, I remember. Still it's worth it," he said as he opened his eyes.

Ghistpok walked over to them, a rolled up parchment in his hands. "If you like, we can take you two to a room and he can rest," he said as he nodded towards Ron. "I will leave the papers for you to sign and once you are done, we can file them with your Ministry. It should take a couple of days before they notice the papers, if they even do."

"Thanks, Ghistpok," Harry replied. He leaned down and helped his friend up from the floor. Ron leaned against him as they followed Ghistpok. The goblin opened the door and waited for them to catch up. Harry pulled Ron into the room and looked around briefly. He was more interested in finding the bed, as Ron was heavy.

He walked them over to the small bed and helped Ron lay down. He pulled the redhead's legs up on the bed and patted him on the arm. "You rest, Ron. Get some sleep and we'll eat when you wake up. As soon as you feel up to it, we can do the blood Rite."

Ron nodded tiredly and slipped into sleep. Harry turned towards Ghistpok and said, "I'll take the paperwork. You can bring us some food in a couple of hours if that is all right with you. Make sure you bring a lot of food. My friend here has a huge appetite."

Ghistpok nodded. "I will. There are some books and magazines in the sitting room for you to read until the time comes to eat."

"Thanks, Ghistpok. You've been a great help," Harry said with a smile.

"It has been my pleasure, Mr. Potter. I hope we can do more business together," Ghistpok replied before giving him a small bow.

Harry smiled at him. "Count on it."

The goblin smiled and left the room. Harry walked into the sitting room, found a book on dragons, and sat down. He sighed softly, thinking briefly of Sirius and what his reaction would've been to the Rite Ron had just done. As he told Ron, he didn't think Sirius would've had a problem with it. His godfather had liked Ron and he would've been proud to have Ron become one of the family. He looked down at the book, opened it, and began to read.

A couple of hours later, Ghistpok came into the room with a couple of strange goblins. They were carrying trays filled with food. They sat them down on the small round table that was in the corner of the sitting room and the two strange goblins left the room.

Ghistpok turned to Harry with a smile. "Your food is here. I will be back in an hour and we can proceed with the next spell."

Harry looked at the abundant amount of food the goblins had brought in. He was pretty sure that Ron would eat everything on the trays. "Thank you, Ghistpok," he said to the goblin.

Ghistpok nodded and left the room. Harry got out of the chair and walked into the bedroom. He ambled up to the bed and grinned at his sleeping friend. Ron was sprawled all over the bed, snoring loudly. He leaned down, shook him, and waited. Ron snorted in his sleep and then rolled over.

Harry sighed. He hated waking Ron up. He knew Ron was a heavy sleeper and didn't want to resort to this, but all was fair in love and, well, waking someone up from the dead.

Harry pulled out his wand, directed it towards Ron, and uttered a spell. A torrent of water fell on Ron's face and he sat up with a yell.

"Bloody hell, you idiot. Can't you see I'm trying to sleep?" Ron bellowed. He opened his mouth to continue the rant, but Harry interrupted him.

"Time to eat," he stated.

Ron shut his mouth with a clack. "Well, why didn't you say so." Harry pointed his wand and uttered another spell, drying Ron off. The redhead rolled off the bed and stood up. "Thanks, mate," Ron said.

Harry grinned at him and walked back into the sitting room with Ron following. Ron hurried over to the table once he saw the food and began to dig in.

"Merlin, Ron, why don't you use a plate," Harry said, a disgusted look on his face as Ron began to shovel food into his mouth.

"I'm hungry," Ron whined.

"Be that as it may, you can still use a plate," Harry stated, exasperated.

"Fine," Ron retorted, as he rolled his eyes. He grabbed a plate and began to pile food on it. Harry shook his head and went to go get some food before Ron ate it all. They sat there in silence as Ron gulped down his food and Harry ate.

After fifteen minutes, Ron looked over at Harry's plate and asked, "Are you going to eat that chicken?"

"Yes, Ron, I plan on eating it. Merlin, you ate all the food on the table and now you want mine?" Harry wondered, exasperated.

Ron gave him a sheepish look. "Sorry, Harry. I've just never felt this hungry before."

"The Rite took a lot of you. You used up most of your energy transferring one signature for another. You're going to be hungry. Other than that, how do you feel?"

Ron checked himself out. "Not too bad. I feel a little strange. I feel more powerful, oddly enough. It just might be that the magic hasn't settled yet."

"Could be, or maybe you are more powerful than before. Remember the Blacks were a powerful family," Harry said.

"Yeah, but Harry, you aren't the true Head of the Black family. While you can give me the name, that's all you can give me. It's not like you had the Black family blood so you couldn't adopt me," Ron explained.

Harry looked thoughtful before replying, "You know, the weird thing is that during the ritual a bright light shot out of the room, straight

through the roof. I thought the wards were supposed to suppress magic."

Ron shrugged. "Don't know. You can ask Ghistpok about later."

Harry nodded. "I think I will," he replied thoughtfully.

They talked about Quidditch as they waited for Ghistpok to return. Harry gave Ron the papers for him to sign. Once were signed, Harry rolled them up and laid them on the table. A few minutes later, Ghistpok walked into the room. "Mr. Potter, Mr. Black, if you are ready, its time for the blood Rite."

Ron looked at Harry and grinned. "Mr. Black, that sounds so strange, but really nice."

Harry grabbed the rolled up parchment and gave it to Ghistpok. With a nod of thanks, Ghistpok left the room and Harry and Ron followed. They sat down at the table and Harry noticed a knife lying on the table. Ron took out his wand, grabbed Harry's hand, and looked at him seriously. "I studied up on this Rite so that I could perform it. Are you sure, Harry? This is permanent. Once it's done, there will be no going back. And, if the trust between us isn't strong enough, one or both of us could die," he reminded Harry urgently.

Harry gave Ron a reassuring smile before clasping him on the shoulder. "I'm sure, Ron. Its time for us to become brothers."

Ron gave him a smile and grabbed his wand. He waved it over their hands and began to chant.

Ones not bound by blood call to the magic,

We beseech you to bind us together.

They began to glow and Harry could feel the magic in the room.

With thy cut, we shall bleed

Ron broke their clasp and took the knife. He grabbed Harry's hand and made a shallow cut in the middle of his palm. He then cut his own palm, watching as the blood began to well up. He put the knife down and grabbed Harry's bloody hand.

With the mix of our blood

Bind us together and call us brothers

Their hands began to glow brightly and Harry felt magic well up inside of him. He began to gasp and the wind began to blow through out the room.

May it never be put asunder,

Forever together as one and as brothers.

With the last sentence uttered, Harry felt overwhelmed with magic. He could feel Ron's magic invading his and felt panic. He calmed himself as he realized this is where the others had died. He relaxed and let Ron's magic invade his own. They mixed together and Harry felt a bond snap into place. He began to see images of Ron's childhood, the day that he had first met Harry, the day they had saved Hermione, the years at Hogwarts, Harry's arrest and trial, and his year of torment when Harry had been in Azkaban. He began to feel emotions that were not his own, but they were so very comforting -- love, affection, humor, cunning, loyalty, friendship -- and he realized these were Ron's feelings. He smiled gently.

They stayed like that for several minutes before the glow dimmed and the spell faded. Harry leaned against the table and panted. He opened his eyes, not realizing that he had closed them. He glanced over at Ron and gasped.

Ron looked up and stared at him, his expression shocked. "Blimey, Harry, you look different."

"So do you, Ron," Harry said, surprised by what he was seeing.

Ron hair was still red, but it was a dark, deep auburn, not the bright red it had once been. There were black highlights throughout his hair. His eyes were brown, but Harry could see bright emerald speckles making them hazel. He had less freckles and his skin was a little darker. The change had been subtle, but it was still enough for Harry to notice.

"Oy, you have red highlights in your hair, and your eyes have brown speckles in them. Damn, you have freckles now Harry, and I think your skin is even a little lighter," Ron informed him, his voice filled with bewildered awe.

Harry chuckled. "It looks like we exchanged a few more things than blood." He could feel excitement and realized that it wasn't coming from him. "Ron, do you feel it?" Harry asked, excitedly.

"What?" Ron inquired.

"I can feel you in the back of my mind if I concentrate. We have a bond," Harry said.

Ron squinted his eyes in concentration and a look of wonder spread over his face. "I'll be, I feel the bond, and I also feel more powerful, yet again. I didn't know this could happen."

"It only happens in very strong bonds. The trust between you must be enormous for such an exchange to happen. The bond between you two will eventually settle down. You'll only feel each other emotions in times of great stress or need," Felkin explained. Ron and Harry grinned at each other.

"If you are ready then it is time for you to go. Ghistpok will show you the way out," Felkin said.

"Oh, before we leave, I meant to ask you. During the Emancipation Rite, I saw a bolt of light leave this room through the ceiling. I thought the room was supposed to keep in magic," Harry wondered.

"Through the ceiling, did you say?" Felkin asked, concerned.

Harry nodded and Felkin frowned thoughtfully. "Is there another Head of the Black family?"

"No, Sirius Black was killed several years ago, and I was named Head of the Black family," Harry informed him sadly.

Felkin frowned even harder. "That is odd. The bolt of light that escaped was searching for the Head of the Black family. You are not it Harry Potter, otherwise the light would have encased you and never escaped through the ceiling. Are you sure that Sirius Black is dead?"

Harry nodded his head then paused before saying, "No, I can't be sure. He fell through the Veil, but there was no body. But, if he is alive, then why hasn't he come to see me? I mean he was my godfather and I cared for him deeply. He was a very influential person in my life..." he trailed off and he looked at Ron, his face horrified.

"He didn't! Ron, tell me he didn't! He can't be that cruel!" Harry cried out.

"Who Harry? Who can't be that cruel?" Ron asked, concerned.

"Dumbledore! Think about it. If someone catches Pettigrew, then Sirius's name would have been cleared. He could then take me to live with him. In one swoop, Dumbledore would lose control over his weapon and lose the money he had been stealing. His position as Executor would've ended because Sirius would've been my official guardian. Merlin, Ron, Sirius is alive and Dumbledore has him locked up somewhere. That bastard!" Harry yelled.

"Bloody Hell!" Ron exclaimed.

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The dark-haired man sat against the wall and stared out the window, bored. It had been years since he had been outside. That bastard Dumbledore wouldn't let him out because he might be seen.

He flushed with rage at the thought of Dumbledore. For the last several years, he'd been locked up, and for what? So Dumbledore

didn't lose control over Harry. He hadn't seen anyone in over two years and he was going mad.

He missed Harry so much and agonized over the fact that Harry believed that he was dead. He felt further despair at the thought of Harry being under Dumbledore's control. He got up and began to pace angrily.

If he ever escaped here, he was taking Dumbledore down. He would make that old fool pay for everything he had done to Harry and himself. When he had asked Dumbledore why he kept him alive his answer enraged Sirius. "I may yet have a use for you. I can control Harry with the knowledge that you are alive. Not to worry, when you're no longer useful to me I will take care of you."

He had thrown a fit of rage like never before. He had destroyed everything in his room. Luckily, Winky, the house-elf that took care of him, was able to fix most of the destroyed things.

He growled and turned to look out the window. He saw nothing but ocean and grass. He didn't know where he was, not that it mattered. He wasn't getting out anytime soon.

A beam of light heading towards the window distracted him. He backed away from the window quickly, but the light surrounded him and he images flashed through his mind. He saw Ron and Harry sitting in a large round room. There was a goblin sitting close to Ron and he wondered what was going on.

We have been called upon to change nature of the red one. a voice whispered softly, filling Sirius with a content feeling. Will you accept him as part of your family? the voice asked. He loosens the bind kept by another. Will you accept him Sirius Black? Will you make him part of your family? the voice asked urgently.

Sirius was confused for a second until he realized that Ron was going through the Emancipation Rite. That would explain why Harry was there. Harry thought he was the Head of the Black family and wanted to give Ron the name. Well, he could do this for Harry, and he liked Ron, so it wouldn't be a hardship.

"I accept," Sirius replied.

So mote it be. the voice whispered and the light surround him turned blue then disappeared.

Sirius gazed at the wall blindly for a second then began to grin. Somehow, he had a feeling that Harry was not under Dumbledore's control anymore and the thought made him smile.

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Translation for the Rite:

By the magic do we call,

To trade one for another,

By my will be done,

Join with a new name,

So that his magic shall be cut asunder,

By your will,

Replace with it another,

Free him from the old ways,

Replace him with a new way,

By your will, by my will,

Let the child be called Weasley no more,

By permission of the new way,

Replace his name with Black,

No longer shall the child be known as Ronald Bilius Weasley,

Now he shall be known as Ron Black,

So mote it be, so mote it be, SO MOTE IT BE!

CHAPTER TEN

Molly Weasley gazed out the window of her home, her expression sad. She missed her youngest child, Ron. She had no clue to where he had gone. He'd taken Harry and Dobby and disappeared. He hid so completely that no one could find him, not even Dumbledore. Her eyes welled up with tears as she thought of her youngest son. She remembered how angry and bitter he was at the meeting. She choked on a sob; she had no one to blame but herself and her family. She had treated him like a pariah. He was her son and she had treated him as if he didn't exist. The tears rolled down her face and she leaned her head against the window.

She felt arms reach around her and pulled her close to a warm body. She turned, grabbed onto her husband, and began to sob with pain. Arthur held her tightly and murmured softly to her, caressing her red hair. He stared out of the window sightlessly. He didn't know what he would do if Ron went through with the Rite. Surely, they'd have a chance to talk him out of it. Dumbledore had said he would try to put the paperwork for the Rite off as long as he could. He just hoped he could use the time to convince his son to stay a part of the family.

Molly was finally quiet, exhausted from her sobbing. She leaned against her husband weakly. "My baby hates us Arthur, and it's our fault. We treated him no better than we would a criminal. And Harry, oh Merlin, Harry," she wailed. She closed her eyes tightly as if to rid herself of the memories she had of Harry's face as she told him, proudly, that she had burned his things. The look of horror and betrayal that had been on his face stabbed her in the heart. They were supposed to be his family and they turned on him, just as they had turned on Ron. Molly didn't know if she was ever going to forgive herself for her betrayal.

Arthur and Molly stood there together quietly, deep in their own thoughts. A few minutes later, they heard someone come into the room. Molly looked around her husband and saw one of the twins. Fred looked downcast and subdued. She hadn't seen him like this since Ginny's death. He looked at his mother and she was shocked to see tears in his eyes.

"He's gone, isn't he?" Fred asked quietly. "I didn't really think he would leave, but there was nothing in his room. I didn't want to believe it when Charlie told me that he had taken his things and disappeared, but he has, hasn't he? He hates us," Fred said, his voice hitched with suppressed emotions. "He hates me and I can't blame him, Mum. I treated him so badly. I did things..." he trailed off, choking on his tears.

Molly pulled back from her husband and hurried over to her son. She grabbed him and held him as he broke down. "He is never going to forgive me. He is going to leave us Mum, he's going to leave."

She rocked her son slightly, gently caressing his hair. "Albus said that he would try to delay the Rite, so we still have some time to convince him to stay. We can apologize to him and hope that he believes us."

"How? We can't even find him! Not even Dumbledore can find him," Fred cried out.

Molly shushed her son before saying, "We'll find him, and then we'll convince him to give us another chance. It's the only thing we can do. I refuse to lose another member of my family. We may have caused it, but by Merlin, we will fix it. I refuse to allow this family to fall apart," Molly stated adamantly.

Arthur gazed at his wife proudly. He loved her dearly and knew that when she was determined, things would happen. He felt confident that they wouldn't lose Ron, and with Dumbledore's help, they would have the time to right their wrongs. He heard a noise, glanced over to the door, and saw the rest of his children, with the exception of Percy, standing there. They all looked subdued and tired. Molly glanced over at them and she opened her arms. As if they were still children instead of full-grown men, they ran to their mother and encircled her and their brother in their arms. Arthur gazed at his family lovingly before joining the hug. They stood there together, quietly, embracing each other.

Bill had been basking in the love of his family, thinking of his brother when he felt something. He glanced up and began to look around, opening his senses. He could feel magic pouring into the house. He

stiffened and pulled back from the hug. He pulled out his wand and began to look around frantically.

The rest of the family noticed his actions and became wary. They knew that he could feel and see magic and his actions were frightening them.

"Son, what is it? What do you feel?" Arthur asked urgently.

"Magic, it's pouring into the house, but I can't see it. It's just getting stronger and stronger," Bill informed him, looking around warily.

"Do you know what it is?" Molly asked.

Bill shook his head before replying, "No, I've never felt this before." He looked around frantically, hoping that this wasn't an attack by You Know Who. He looked up and gasped, he could see a red ball of magic slowly appearing above them. It was getting stronger and brighter by the second.

"Bloody hell, what in the hell is that?" George asked, his face filled with disbelief, shock and fear.

Bill looked at him sharply before asking, "You can see that?"

"Yeah, mate, it's like a red glowing ball of energy," George answered, his eyes on the red ball of energy.

"It's magic and very strong magic at that," Bill said, staring at the growing ball warily.

"Maybe we should leave," Charlie suggested.

"I agree. I have no clue to what that is and I don't want to stay here and find out," Arthur said. "Let's go." The family began to move towards the door when the ball suddenly pulsated, glowed brightly, and then shattered. A red stream of magic hit every member of the family and entered their body. They gasped in pain and shock and slumped over, unconscious.

Several minutes later, Charlie began to stir. He groaned and his eyes fluttered open. "Ugh, what in the hell happened?" he asked and looked around. He sat up in shock when he saw the rest of his family lying on the floor unconscious. He swayed for a moment and sat still until the dizziness passed. He crawled over to his father and began to shake him. "Dad, wake up. Come on, old man, rise and shine."

His father groaned before replying, "Don't call me old man. What happened?" he asked after he had opened his eyes.

"Not sure, but whatever it was it knocked everyone unconscious. Help me get them up." Charlie helped his father up and they began to wake up the other members of their family. When they were all conscious, Bill checked for the magic that had been there previously.

"There's nothing here anymore. Not even a trace of it. It appears to have dissipated," Bill said, frowning thoughtfully.

"I wonder what it could have been," Arthur wondered. They sat down and began to talk, throwing out theories, and a majority of them had to do with You Know Who. Molly was quiet. She knew that there was something missing. Something was gone and she couldn't figure out what it was.

She looked around with a frown and began to scan the house, but could find nothing out of place. The sense of something missing was growing more urgent and she began to get restless. She stood up and began to pace, the sensation was not going away and it was beginning to scare her.

"Mum, you all right?" George asked worriedly. The rest of the family noticed their mother's agitated state.

"Molly, dear, what's going on?" Arthur questioned, concerned.

"Something's missing," she stated.

"What?" Charlie asked, confused.

"Something is missing and I can't figure out what. It's a growing, gnawing sense that I have. I feel that there's something missing from either the house or me and I can't figure out what it is," she told him fretfully.

Bill stood up, walked over to his mother, and grabbed her. "Mum, stop. Come and sit down and we can figure this out." He led her over to the couch and sat her down. He made Fred move and sat down next to her. He grabbed her hand and patted it. "All right, now mum, I want you to breathe deeply a couple times, letting your breath out slowly. Do this until you're calm." He waited until she had calmed down and relaxed a little. "Good, now I want you to close your eyes and look inward. See if you can realize what is missing. Go through your memories of the house to see if anything is gone. Take your time, there's no rush."

Molly flicked through her memories and found nothing was missing after the magic had entered their home. She still couldn't get over the nagging sense that there was something gone. She opened her eyes and looked at her son. "There's nothing missing. Everything is still in its place, but Bill, the sense is growing stronger."

"All right, so it isn't material," Bill murmured absently, his mind racing.

"Maybe it's the magic," Fred piped up. "Maybe the ball of energy took some of our magic."

George hit him on the arm, ignoring his brother's yelp. "Shut up. It's didn't steal our magic. I feel just as powerful as before."

Fred pouted at his brother. "It could've been," he griped.

Bill paused in thought then said, "No, wait, that's actually a good idea." He looked back over to his mother. "Mum, close your eyes again and open your magic. Test the strength and see if anything is missing."

She nodded and took a deep breath. She closed her eyes and withdrew into herself. She went to the core of her magic and began to check the strength. She frowned to herself as she realized that she

hadn't lost any magic. If anything, it looked as if she had gained some, but that didn't make sense. She began to check the bonds she had with her children and found that though they were thin, they were still there. She checked everyone, stopping at the ragged black link that had been the bond to Ginny. She felt a pang of loss and continued. They were all fine, all five of them. She paused, Five? There should be six. Frantically, she began to search and couldn't find the bond with Ron anywhere. It was gone. She had found what she was missing. She gasped and opened her eyes in shock.

"No!" she yelled. She got up from the couch and ran over to the family clock, ignoring the calls of her family. Ron was missing from the clock and there was no sign that he had ever been on it.

"Oh Merlin, oh please, no!" she gasped and ran to her bedroom. She flung open the door and hurried over to her closet. She began to throw things out, looking frantically. She finally found what she had been looking for, moved over to her bed, and sat down, ignoring her husband, who had followed her. She opened the book, *Lineage of the Weasleys* and found the last page. She stared at the page, shocked, and the book dropped from her hands. She stared sightlessly at it, unable to grasp what she had found.

Arthur came running into the room while Molly was rummaging through the closet. "Molly, love, what is it? What happened?" he asked, but his wife ignored him. Molly had found whatever it was she had been searching for and walked over to the bed. He watched as she opened the book and frantically began to go through it. Whatever it was that she read had shocked her. She turned white with horror and the book fell to the floor, with her gazing at it sightlessly.

He walked over to his wife and grabbed her. "Molly, what is it?" he asked frantically, trying to get her to talk to him.

Charlie and his brothers had ran after their father and found him sitting next to their shocked mother. He frowned, concerned, wondering what had happened. He looked down on the floor and saw the book that his mother had been staring at. He squatted down and picked it up. He heard his mother whimper, looked up, and saw her staring at the book intently.

"He's gone. He has left us," she moaned. "He did it, oh Merlin, he did it."

Charlie looked at his father in confusion and his father shrugged, he didn't have a clue. Charlie looked at the book and noticed the name. He froze; a cold chill creeping up his spine. "Oh no," he whispered and opened the book. He went to the last page and skimmed down the family tree. Ron was missing from the tree. He had done the Rite; he was no longer a Weasley. He dropped the book and looked at his father, his face white with shock and pain. "Ron did it. He did the Rite, father. He's no longer a Weasley. He left us!" he said flatly and tears began to fall.

He heard the rest of his family gasp as understanding grasped them. "The magic, that's what the magic ball had been," Bill informed them hoarsely. "We were receiving his bond, his magic. He no longer needed it. Oh Merlin," he whispered.

"I thought Dumbledore was supposed to delay it," Fred asked, pain shining from his eyes.

"He must have found another way to do the Rite, but how?" Charlie asked.

No one could answer that question. "What do you think his name is now?" George wondered softly.

"I don't know. We won't be able to find out either, not even Dumbledore. The paperwork is spelled so that only certain people at the Ministry can see it. It's to protect the privacy of the person going through the Rite. Only Ron can give permission for others to see it and that's not going to happen," Arthur said.

"Maybe Dumbledore can help," Bill suggested hopefully.

Arthur shook his head before saying, "It won't matter. He can't read it either."

Molly began to sob hysterically. "My baby, my baby is gone. Ron is gone. Oh Merlin, help me. I've lost another one." She began to wail with pain and Arthur gathered her up into his arms. He rocked her gently and looked over at his sons. "Could you please go? I need to comfort your mother," he asked gently.

They nodded and began to leave, gazing at their sobbing mother sadly. Arthur watched them leave, and then turned back to his wife. He held her tightly and closed his eyes. Tears fell from his eyes as his wife cried for their lost son. It didn't matter that he was still alive, he was no longer a Weasley, and his loss had been their fault. He began to cry softly.

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Later that night, Arthur closed the bedroom door quietly and walked down the stairs to the living room. Molly had finally fallen into an exhausted sleep and Arthur thought it was time to fire call Dumbledore with the news.

He reached the living room and found his sons talking softly. There were tear tracks on several of the guilt-ridden faces. They looked up when they heard their father.

"How's mum?" Bill asked quietly.

"She finally fell asleep. I'm going to call Dumbledore and see if he knows anything." He walked over to the fireplace and grabbed some floo powder and threw it into the fireplace. "Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts," he said. He leaned his head in and called out for Dumbledore.

The Headmaster looked up from his paperwork. He was sitting at his desk and he looked at Arthur, a surprised expression on his face.

"Arthur, what is it? Are you all right? Molly, the kids?" he asked.

"No, I can't really say that everything is all right," Arthur replied sadly.

Dumbledore straightened and gazed at the man intently, his face serious. "What's wrong?"

"Somehow Ron did the Rite. Molly no longer has a bond with him and he's been erased from the family tree. We received his magic today, Dumbledore. My family is devastated. Do you know how this could've happened? I know you said that you were going to try and delay it so that we had time to talk to Ron, but it's too late."

Dumbledore stared at him, shocked. "He did what?" he exclaimed. "But how? The paperwork hasn't even gone through yet."

Arthur shook his head in bewilderment. "I don't know. I was hoping you could tell me. It has come as a shock to all of us. I was wondering if maybe you could find out. I know it might be difficult, but with your connections, I thought you might at least have a chance."

"Of course, dear friend. I'll try to find out immediately. How long ago was this?" Dumbledore asked.

"Several hours at least. I had to console Molly or else I would've called sooner." Arthur said. Arthur heard Molly yelling for him frantically and he looked at the Headmaster. "I have to go, Molly's calling for me. Let me know what you find out. Goodbye, Albus." He pulled his head out of the fireplace and ran up to his room. He opened the door and found his frantic wife lying on the bed, sobbing hysterically. He crossed the room, reaching the bed and laid down next to his wife. He held her tightly and closed his eyes. He sighed deeply. He was concerned that his wife may never recover from this. He hoped that they could get through this with the rest of their family intact.

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Dumbledore watched as Arthur's head disappeared from the fireplace. He growled furiously. He had thought to use the Rite as a bargaining chip with Ron, but again he had been outsmarted. He was getting sick and tired of being shown up by a poor, pathetic wizard from a disgraced Wizarding family. If he didn't need Arthur's help in maintaining his power, he would have gotten rid of the family long ago.

He got up from his desk and stalked over to the fireplace. He grabbed some floo and threw it in the fireplace calling out, "Elizabeth Cameron, Department of Magical Rites."

"Albus?" a querulous voice asked.

"Lizzie, wonderful to see you again my dear. It's been ages," he said kindly to the old woman who was glaring at him.

"Not nearly long enough, you old fool. What in the hell do you want?" she asked angrily.

Dumbledore chuckled in amusement. He smiled at the woman before saying, "Lizzie, you aren't still mad at me for missing that one date, can you?"

She glared at Dumbledore and gave an indignant sniff before replying, "Of course not, it's that third date you missed that I'm still angry about."

Dumbledore chuckled. "It's been over a hundred years now Lizzie, don't you think its time to let it go."

Lizzie snorted with anger. She gave Dumbledore a hateful look before replying, "Not bloody likely. Now, what did you want? I know you didn't call to reminisce."

Dumbledore sighed sadly, his eyes no longer twinkling. "No, you're right, I didn't. I just received some disturbing news from a dear friend and I was wondering if you could help me out," he inquired.

"Depends on what it is, you old coot."

"Arthur Weasley found out that his youngest son went through with the Rite of Emancipation. I hadn't even started the paperwork on it yet. How could he have done this? Could you also tell me his new name?"

Lizzie stared at him a second then smirked. "I'm sorry Albie, but as policy states, I cannot tell you a thing. Young Mr. Weasley didn't need your help to start the process. As you know, it only takes a few hours to get the paperwork for the Rite passed through. He may have decided not to trust you, Albie. Merlin knows I wouldn't. Don't forget I know you."

Dumbledore glared at her. "I want to know how he did it. There was no warning at all and I don't find this acceptable," he said icily.

Lizzie laughed harshly before replying, "You can't stand not having control over others can you, Albie? Well, I can't tell you a thing nor would I if I could. You obviously don't have young Mr. Weasley's permission to view his new name or you wouldn't be coming to me. I don't have anymore to say to you, Albie. Take your control issues elsewhere."

"Lizzie, you don't want me as an enemy. I just want the information," he said with a growl.

"Are you trying to say that you're above Ministry law, Albie? I'm not one of your pathetic Ministry workers that you can bribe. You know as well as I do that only certain people within this department can see the information you need. I'm one of them and I'm telling you that by law you have no rights to the information. I will only tell you if Mr. Weasley tells me himself I can, but by that time, it would be a little redundant because you would already know his name. Face it Albie, there's nothing you can do about it. I bet that just twists you up inside doesn't, old friend?" she asked with a sneer.

Albus growled angrily. "You make an enemy of me Lizzie, and it will be the last thing you ever do," he snarled.

Lizzie snickered with grim amusement. "Albie, I'm an old woman who has lived her life. I'm not scared of death. You forget I was a Slytherin. This call has been recorded, as are all the calls that come through here and the recording will be put into a vault for safekeeping. If I die or if you try anything, it will be given to the Ministry and a copy will be sent to the papers. I'm not stupid Albie, I know that behind your kind, benevolent mask beats a heart of an evil, manipulative man.

Remember, I was in love with you once. I know you well and just because no one else can see it, doesn't mean it's not true. Now, if you don't need anything else, I have work to do. Goodbye, Albus," she said before cutting off the firecall.

The Headmaster glared at the woman and withdrew his head from the fireplace. He gave a yell of rage, picked up a glass figurine that had been sitting on the mantle and threw it. It shattered as it hit the wall. He was panting with white-hot rage. Nothing had been going right for him. He had lost his weapon. Harry was supposed to lead him to more power before he killed the brat, and now, he couldn't find him. He had underestimated a child and now he had lost his money as well. He was beginning to lose control and he was not a happy man.

He picked up some floo powder and flung it in the fireplace. "Severus Snape, Hogwarts" he called out and stuck his head in the green fire. "Severus, come to my office. Now!" he snapped. The man looked up at him startled then composed himself. "Of course, Headmaster. Right away."

Dumbledore pulled back from the fire and began to pace. He thought furiously; there were no clues as to where Ron had taken Harry. He needed that boy back under his control before he regained awareness. He wanted him firmly entrenched in his beliefs. With a few potions, there should be no problems with that. Harry may be impervious to the Imperious curse, but there were still several Dark potions that could do the job just as well. If it destroyed the boy's mind, well, that was just too damn bad.

It didn't matter though, until he found Harry and Ron, there wasn't a thing he could do about it. The people he had hired to look for them hadn't found a thing. If he didn't know better, he'd almost think that they disappeared off the ends of the Earth.

He heard the door open and watched as Snape came into the room. He sneered at the pathetic man. Here was his spy, his servant. This man was under his control and would never be free of him. Snape had thought he was getting a kinder, gentler master than Voldemort, but he had been wrong. He smiled at the man maliciously and

watched in amusement as the man paled. "Have you found anything?"

"No, Headmaster. There has been no trace of the two young men. I questioned the house-elves, but they had no clue to where Dobby had gone. They just said that he left to serve another house."

"What about Gringotts?" Dumbledore asked.

"Mr. Weasley hasn't been seen there since the day before yesterday. Do you know why he was there?" Snape asked curiously.

Dumbledore stared at the man suspiciously, but the man merely looked curious. "It's none of your business. Stick to finding Weasley. I want him found and I want Potter back in my control. I will not let years of work go down the drain because of one ignorant child. Find them Snape, or I will give you a lesson like none you have ever had before. Now leave me," he growled angrily.

Snape bowed, turned, and left the room. "Winky!" he called out.

"Yes, Master?" she asked fearfully.

"How is the mutt?" he bit out.

"Mutt is fine, sirs. Winky fed him today."

"I want you to decrease his food. He will only have gruel and water from now on. That is all."

"Yes, Master." The house-elf disappeared.

I am beginning to think the mutt is a liability, but I am not ready to kill him off yet. I might need him in order to coerce Harry into doing my bidding. But, there is no point to feeding him more than I have to. Slowly, but surely, that man will die. And when I get a hold of that Weasley boy, I will make him regret ever going against me, Dumbledore thought furiously. He will die by my hands and I will revel in his death.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"I'm going to kill him," Harry stated calmly.

Ron swallowed hard at the comment. Usually he wouldn't worry, but the look in Harry's eyes scared him. He had only seen that look when the subject of You Know Who came up. It was the same look of determination, rage, and iciness that made people very afraid. Ron wished that Dumbledore was here to see the look, because if he had, the man would have been running for the hills.

"Now Harry, you can't kill him...yet. You have to find Sirius first, then you need to kill You Know Who, after that you take care of Dumbledore. We don't need to trade one mad man for another."

Harry looked at him then scowled. "Have you considered that when I get rid of Voldemort, Dumbledore will try everything in his power to get rid of me? He can't have me running around taking away his power, can he? No, Dumbledore will try to get rid of me so we need make sure that he can't."

"We do have the contract and the paperwork showing his theft. That in itself is good for some time in Azkaban," Ron commented.

"The contract will only hold him off for so long. I'm sure he'll try to find a way around it. Sadly, the paperwork shows only the theft of my money. That would get him six months in Azkaban, in a spell free cell then another year under house arrest at his home. That would give him time to plan and I don't want that. Right now, he fears a loss of respect and power, but if he feels cornered, he'll fight back, and if he thinks he has nothing to lose, then no one is safe. We could have another Dark Lord on our hands," Harry said with a frown.

Ron stared at him, disconcerted. "You don't think he's that bad, do you?" he asked. "I mean, sure he stole your money and kept the fact that Sirius was alive from you, but surely he can't be evil."

Harry looked at Ron sadly. "I hadn't thought so, but for him to do this, Ron? He kept my godfather away from me and why? Because of money, it was nothing more than pure and simple greed. Do you

honestly think that he cares about anything but his power and his name? He may not be as bad as Voldemort, but he's still a manipulative bastard and he shouldn't be allowed to get away with what he is doing."

Ron frowned then shrugged with resignation. "No, I guess not. I just didn't want to believe that the man I had looked up to for so many years is so manipulative."

Harry grabbed Ron's shoulder and squeezed gently. "I know. I've gotten used to people disappointing me, but it's still hard to know that the grandfatherly man we grew up with is nothing more than a power hungry tyrant. And another thing, don't you think it's time for you to call Voldemort by his name?"

Ron grimaced before replying, "I know, but it's hard. All I can do is promise to try."

Harry grinned at Ron. "That's fine. If you can't call him Voldemort, then call him Tom." Harry suddenly looked serious, "How are we going to find Sirius? I'm assuming that the Headmaster has him locked up tight, warded, and under the Fidelius spell somewhere. Damn, it's going to be hard to find him."

"True, but you know we have to. He would do the same for us," Ron said firmly.

Harry nodded then smirked. "I wonder what Sirius is going to say when he finds out I was thrown into Azkaban? I could probably just sit back and let Sirius go after the Headmaster. Merlin knows he's going to be angry enough with the man as it is."

"Forget the Headmaster, how's he going to feel when he finds out that Remus turned on you as well?"

Harry snorted, disgusted. "The poor werewolf is going to have his whole world shattered, isn't he? First, he finds out that I'm innocent, and then he's going to find out that Sirius is alive, and that his beloved Headmaster has been lying to him for years. Whatever will he do?" Harry sneered.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Overly dramatic enough?"

Harry crossed his arms and pouted. "Damn it, Ron. I'm tired of you killing my moments. Stop it!"

Ron snickered at the petulant look on Harry's face. "You're the hero, Harry. I'm the funny, sarcastic sidekick. Get use to it."

Harry laughed and looked at Felkin. He'd been standing there waiting patiently for them to finish talking. "I want to thank you for all you've done. Without you, I wouldn't have known that my godfather was alive."

Felkin bowed his head slightly. "It was my pleasure. I have only one request of you."

"Yes?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"I would like to see you...what is it you humans say....um...ah yes...kick Voldemort's ass," Felkin said with a sly smile.

Harry and Ron stared at the goblin in disbelief. Ron started to snicker and Harry grinned. Harry looked at Ron, his eyebrow arched, and they started to laugh. Ron had tears in his eyes and Harry couldn't breathe. Felkin stood there with a smug smile on his face while the two men tried to control themselves.

A moment later, a snickering Harry looked at Felkin and grinned. "I will. I'll give him your regards as he lies dying at my feet."

Felkin gave him a feral grin. "That would be most excellent."

They shook hands with the goblin. Harry looked at Ron and smiled. "Make sure you put your glamour on."

Ron nodded, took out his wand, and cast the spell. He looked at his wand, surprised. "Whoa!" he said.

Harry looked at him, concerned. "What's wrong?"

"There's nothing wrong. Remember when I told you that I felt a little more powerful after the Rite?" he paused and Harry nodded his head. "Well, when I cast the spell it was easier. My magic is stronger."

"Interesting. We'll have to test that later, when we get home." Ron nodded and Harry took out his wand and cast his glamour.

They both turned towards the door where Biletooth was waiting to walk them out. Together the three of them walked out of the room, down the hallway and through the door. They had entered the main room when Harry suddenly turned to Biletooth. "I just realized, I need to get some money out of my vault. In fact, is there a way that I can get money without having to come to my vault every time I run out?"

"We have a bottomless sack that you can buy at a very reasonable fee. It has the Elevo Saccus spell on it to lighten your load. You can fill it up with as much as you want and it will not put a strain on you. There is also a Securitas spell on it, so that your sack cannot be stolen. The spell needs to be recast every two years by us, for a small fee. We know that wizards are busy, so we will send you a letter when the time comes for the spell to be recast," Biletooth told him, his face expressionless.

"Why do you have to recast the spell? Couldn't I do it myself and save myself the fee?" Harry asked curiously.

"You could, but in matters of security, there is no one better than the goblins. Our magic is such that a wizard cannot break it. Therefore your sack will always be secure," he explained.

Harry nodded in understanding. "Very well. I would like a sack and another for my brother. You can take the money from my account."

"If you would wait here a moment," Biletooth said and gave them a small bow before leaving.

Harry looked around, bored. He watched as the witches and the wizards went about their daily lives. He suddenly stiffened and Ron looked over at him, concerned. "What?"

"Tonks is here. She's over by the door," Harry explained.

"Where? I don't see her," Ron stated as he looked around.

"She's leaning against the wall by the large statue of a goblin."

"Harry, the only person I see is an old woman. I can't find Tonks anywhere," Ron said with irritation.

Harry paused then smiled with delight. "Well what do you know, my little magical aura thingy is good for something. I can see her as clear as day. Remember Tonks is a Metamorphmagus."

"Magical aura thingy?" Ron asked with a snicker.

"It's not like I know the true name for it, Ginger," Harry replied as he rolled his eyes.

"Don't call me that," Ron snapped with mock anger.

Harry smiled and watched as Tonks took one last look around. She looked over to where Ron and Harry were standing and her eyes went wide. She stared a moment and Harry knew then that she could see past their glamours.

"Shit," Harry muttered.

"What?" Ron asked.

"Tonks recognized us," he answered as he watched the Auror stare at him. She tilted her head thoughtfully, looking back and forth between Harry and Ron. Harry stood frozen, waiting for her to come over and say something. Damn it! He wasn't ready for anyone to find out about him yet.

After a moment of staring, she seemed to make up her mind. She nodded her head, gave him a soft smile, and left the bank.

"Damn, she left. Ron, wait here. I need to talk to her or Obliviate her. No one can know about me. I need to know if Dumbledore is having her spy on us," he said urgently. Harry growled at the thought that Dumbledore was out looking for them.

"Go ahead. I'll wait for Biletooth. Be careful, Harry," Ron said.

Harry nodded and left the bank. He cursed as he realized he had no idea where Tonks had gone. He stood in the middle of the street and sighed. Damn. He hadn't been quick enough.

"Wotcher, Harry," a voice said softly from behind him.

Harry whirled around and stared at the woman in front of him. "Tonks," he growled.

"It's nice to see that you're doing better," Tonks told him.

"Spying for you master, were you?" Harry snarled.

Tonks blinked, surprised, before frowning. "Master? What do you mean?"

"Dumbledore! I just bet you can't wait to tell that old fool that I'm better. Fine, when you do, tell that bastard that if he does anything to try to find me, I'll have his ass in Azkaban so fast his head will spin. The Wizarding World isn't going to like the fact that their beloved leader was stealing from their Savior," Harry sneered.

Tonks stared at him, her face grave. "Harry, I'm not spying for Dumbledore. I'm not even part of the Order anymore. I was doing my job. I work as security for the bank in my off hours. I haven't seen Dumbledore for months," she informed him.

Harry gazed at her, surprised. "Really? Why?" he asked.

"Because I couldn't believe that he would let you go to prison for something you didn't do. Hell, Harry, I may not have known you all that well, but even I knew you wouldn't have killed anyone. I tried to make the Headmaster see sense, but when he refused to help you, I

realized that I couldn't work for a man who threw you away. So I left the Order."

"Oh," Harry replied softly.

"I understand that you don't believe me, and I can understand why. Everyone, but Ron betrayed your trust. But know this, I'm not one of them. I would've helped, but I was alone in my belief or at least that I knew," Tonks said.

"So you weren't looking for me at the bank?" Harry asked.

Tonks laughed. "No, trust me, it was a surprise to see you and Weasley. In fact, I was surprised to realize that you knew who I was. Very few could see past my Metamorphmagus changes. The few who can have the magical sight."

Harry blushed and Tonks eyes widened with delight. "Well, that's great! I have it as well. That's how I could see you and Ron under your glamours. It's one of the reasons the Goblins hire me to watch their bank. They need the little extra bit of help. Do you have anyone to help your gift grow?" she asked.

Harry shook his head. "No, not yet. I don't want anyone to know where I am," he told her.

Tonks frowned. "Why would you want that?"

Harry sighed. "I'm hiding from Dumbledore and the rest of the Wizarding World. Dumbledore thinks that I'm catatonic from my stay in Azkaban. He doesn't realize that it was an act. Ron took me out of Hogwarts, along with Dobby, and we hid. I've found out some things about the Headmaster that I didn't know before and he knows that I know, well some of them. You can't tell anyone that you've seen me. As far as anyone knows, Harry Potter has mush for brains right now."

Tonks looked thoughtful. "So that's why you accused me of spying," she stated and Harry nodded. "So, Dumbledore really stole from you?"

"Yeah, Ron told me since he's was in charge of my estate. Trust me, I'm not a happy camper."

Tonks smirked. "Yeah, I can imagine why."

"So," Harry began nervously. "You won't tell anyone, will you?"

Tonks shook her head. "I promise not to say anything to anyone without your permission. Wizard's oath," she stated. There was a flare of magic as the oath took hold.

Harry sighed, relieved. "Thanks. I guess I should be getting back to Ron. I'm sure he's waiting impatiently. He probably thinks you've kidnapped me and are taking me back to Dumbledore," he said with a chuckle.

Tonks snickered. "Yeah, probably. Harry, if you ever need anything, owl me. I'll help you if I can. In fact, if you need any help with your magical sight, let me know. I would be glad to teach you."

Harry smiled at her. "Thanks, I will."

Tonks hugged him and with a cheerful wave, walked off. Harry was happy to know that Tonks believed him. He had always liked her. He made his way back into the bank and found Ron pacing nervously.

"Hey," Harry greeted.

Ron looked up, his face relieved. "There you are! I thought for sure that Tonks had kidnapped you and taken you back to Dumbledore."

Harry repressed the laughter that welled up inside him. He had been right. Harry shook his head. "Na, in fact, she doesn't even talk to Dumbledore. She's no longer part of the Order."

"Huh?" Ron asked, confused.

Harry proceeded to tell him the conversation he'd had with Tonks. Ron was amazed and happy to find that Harry had another friend and ally.

"Well, looks like Dumbledore's foolishness lost himself a rather spectacular spy. Idiot," Ron muttered.

Harry laughed and agreed. "Just so you know, I wasn't kidding about the killing Dumbledore," he said softly.

Ron sighed before replying, "I know. I realize you have good reason too, but maybe you should let Voldemort do the killing. He always wanted to take care of the Headmaster. You can direct Voldemort where you need him and let him do the rest."

Harry snickered at the amusing picture of a gleeful Voldemort torturing the Headmaster. He shook his head when the image of Dumbledore kept offering the Dark Lord a lemon drop, a bright cheerful look on his face. Ugh. "That would be funny. Voldemort takes care of the Headmaster, I take care of Voldemort, then I can rule the world and you can run it! Excellent!" Harry hissed evilly.

Ron sighed, reached over, and smacked him upside the head. "No, you can't rule the world. You'd hate the paperwork."

Harry crossed his arms and pouted. "You never let me have any fun," he whined.

Ron arched an eyebrow at him and Harry was envious, wish I could do that. "Did I or did I not let you play with Susie?"

Harry grinned and looked around. "Where is my newest best friend?" He saw Glixx standing by the counter and yelled, "Oh, Susie! How's that name thing coming?"

Ron started to laugh as Glixx glared at Harry. The other people in the bank watched them in confusion. Harry ignored them and smiled at Glixx brightly. "Why don't you come over here and talk to me, Susie? I missed you while I was gone."

Ron covered his mouth with his hand to hold in his laughter when Glixx hissed at them and stomped off. Harry chuckled. "Some people are so touchy about their names, isn't that right, Ginger?"

"Oi! I told you not to call me that," Ron protested.

Harry opened his mouth to reply, but closed it when he saw Biletooth approaching them. He held out his hand and lying in his palm were two silver sacks. "There is an unlimited amount of room in this sack. Take care of what of you put in here though, I have heard rumors of people getting lost in them."

"Really?" Ron asked, his expression wary.

Biletooth shrugged nonchalantly. "There are only rumors, but I could see where it could happen."

Harry nodded and took the sacks from Biletooth's hand. He passed one over to Ron and looked at his curiously. "You know this material looks and feels similar to the material that my invisibility cloak was made out of."

"It is. They are both made of the hair of the Demiguise. The difference are the spells that are used. With different spells, the properties of the material can change. The changes must be made during the weaving of the Demiguise hair. After it's been woven the properties of the material cannot be changed."

"Coolies," Ron said.

Ghistpok approached them and asked, "Are you gentlemen still interested in seeing your vaults?"

They both nodded and Ghistpok turned to Biletooth. "I will take them down." Biletooth grunted, turned, and walked away.

Ghistpok smiled, turned, and began to walk. "Follow me, please," he requested over his shoulder. They went past several counters until they came to a large door guarded by several Goblin soldiers. Harry nodded at them and they stared at him in surprise. They went through the door and down the steps. When they saw the cart that traveled through the large caverns under the bank and Ron moaned. "I hate this thing."

Harry snickered as they all got into the cart. Ghistpok started it up and took off. Harry giggled before asking, "Can you go any faster?"

Ron moaned and Ghistpok looked at Harry, his eyes filled with surprise. "I thought wizards couldn't handle the speed of the cart."

"I'm what you call an adrenaline junky. The faster you go, the more I like it."

Ghistpok looked at him a second then grinned evilly. He pushed a button on the cart and the cart began to blast through the caverns. Harry yelled out in excitement while Ron screamed. "Make it stop! Make it stop! Oh Merlin, I'm going to be sick! Aaaaahhhhhh!" Ron begged.

The cart began to slow down then stopped. Ghistpok got out first. "Vault 12," he said.

Harry got out of the cart and bounced around excitedly. "Wow, that was fun. Did you like it, Ron?"

Ron staggered out of the cart and moaned. His face was pale. He glared at Harry. "I hate you so much right now."

"Why? It was fun. The speed, the twisting, the turning, going up, going down, back and forth, side to side," Harry said while swaying his body.

Ron's face turned green and he ran over to the edge of the platform. He leaned against a stone column while he threw up. Harry looked at him, and then shrugged. He gazed down at Ghistpok. "Eh...guess he didn't like it," Harry quipped with an innocent look

Ghistpok chuckled and held out his hand. "Key, please," he said. Harry searched through his pockets and found his key. He gave it to Ghistpok and the goblin inserted it into the keyhole. The lock clicked and the door opened. Ghistpok walked in and Harry looked over at Ron. "You all right over there?"

Ron straightened up and staggered over to Harry. "Fine," he replied hoarsely.

"Ewww, Ron, freshen your breath. Vomit is not a good smell," Harry told him as he held his hand over his nose.

Ron grabbed his wand and cast a spell to clean his mouth. He put his wand away and glared at Harry. "Well, whose fault is that?"

"Ghispok's?" Harry asked innocently. "Come on, my friend, let's go check out my family vault."

They walked into the vault and stopped. There was another set of doors inside the vault. Harry could see a shimmering red shield surrounding it. "Why is there another door in here and why is it shielded?"

"Only those of the Potter line can open that door. You need to place your hand in the indentation on the wall next to the door. Once there, your hand will then be pricked with a sharp object and a drop of blood will be spilt. A spell will activate and it will analyze your blood. If you are of Potter blood, then the door will open, if you aren't, then you had better run because the security spell around the vault will activate and you will be pulverized," Ghispok explained.

"Whoa. I guess my forefather's really wanted to protect their gold," Harry said.

"Actually, it was your Grandfather who implemented the security measures several days before he died," Ghispok informed him. "He commented that he really wanted to protect something, but he never told me what it was."

Harry walked over the indentation on the wall and nervously placed his hand in it. He tensed; waiting for the stab of pain he knew would follow. He jumped as he felt something sharp hit his hand. He cursed at the pain and watched as a drop of blood fell into the indentation. It began to glow a bright green color then it turned red. A voice called out from around the vault, "Welcome, Harry James Potter, son of

James and Lily Potter. Go forth and claim what is rightfully yours by blood."

The shield that had been surrounding the door fell and it began to move. Harry backed away from the wall and stood next to Ron. He looked down at his bleeding hand and took out his wand. He cast a small healing spell on the cut and sighed in relief as the pain vanished. He heard Ron gasp and looked up. Harry froze, shocked. "Oh, Merlin. Oh wow!"

The vault was huge. On one side of the vault galleons, sickles and knuts lined the wall from top to bottom. It went as far back as Harry could see. On the other side, he could see furniture, magical items, weapons, portraits, and jewelry. In addition, there were other things he couldn't identify, but right now, he was too busy staring at the money. He gaped at the money and it suddenly hit him. He was stinking rich and this was only one vault out of six that he had. Harry started to giggle insanely and Ron looked at him in trepidation.

"Harry, mate, you all right?" the redhead asked.

"I'm rich, Ron. It just hit me how freaking rich I am. Oh, the things I can do with the money. Come on." Harry grabbed Ron's hand and pulled him into the vault. He opened his bottomless sack and began to throw money in it, humming happily. "How much do you think I should take? I don't want to come back whenever I need money."

Ron looked thoughtful before shrugging. "Not sure. You can take a lot out and leave some at home in a safe place. That way if, Merlin forbid, your bag actually gets stolen, there won't be a huge amount left in the sack." Ron paused as Ghispok glared at him. "No offense, but this is Harry Potter we're talking about. If it's not supposed to happen, then it'll happen to him.

Harry grunted in agreement, remembering all the things that had happened to him before he was sent to Azkaban. When he was younger, he couldn't see it, but now that he was older, he wondered how much of what had happened when he was younger had been arranged by Dumbledore. It would explain why three eleven year-old children could get past the traps that had been set by adults in their

first year, and how the Hogwarts, the supposedly safest place in the Wizarding World, wasn't so safe. It just didn't make sense. Or the fact that Dumbledore had never been there just when Harry needed him the most, except for fifth year. But even that was suspicious. Oh yeah, the Headmaster definitely had something to do with it, and sadly, that had just been the beginning.

After Harry felt that he had thrown enough galleons, sickles and knuts into the sack, he closed it. "Wonder how much I have in here," he mused.

"There is a simple spell to check for that. Point your wand at the sack and say *Aes Signatum Mensura* and the amount of money you have in the sack should appear," Ghistpok explained.

Harry took his wand and pointed it at the sack. "*Aes Signatum Mensura*," he muttered. Letters glowed lightly on the sack. He had around 5,432 galleons in the bag, 300 silver sickles, and 200 knuts in the bag. He nodded, satisfied, as he watched the words disappear from the sack. "That should be enough for now."

"Oi Harry! Over here," Ron yelled. Harry glanced around and realized that while he had been having fun over the money, Ron had taken to exploring the vault.

"Hey, Ron, where are you?"

"I'm towards the back, past the weapons. There is a little niche back here, and there is something I think you should see," he yelled.

Harry walked around the mounds of money, furniture, and miscellaneous magical items to find Ron standing in front of a darkened niche. He walked up to Ron and looked into the niche. Inside were a couple of Pensieves. Intrigued, Harry reached for the pensieves, but his hand hit a shield instead. He cursed as the shield shocked his fingers and he pulled his hand back.

"Hey, Ghistpok," Harry called and the goblin came walking over to them.

"Yes, Mr. Potter?"

"What is this shield around the niche?" Harry asked. "There are a couple of Pensieves in there, but I can't get to it."

"Ah, yes. It is like the shield that guards the door to this vault. If you look, you will find an indentation in the wall over there. As you did with the door, you simply place your hand in the indentation and the spell takes care of the rest," Ghistpok explained.

Harry nodded his thanks and took out his wand. "Lumos," he said and light filled the niche. He looked around on the wall and found the indentation. With a sigh, he reluctantly put his hand into the indentation, and waited for the pain that he knew would be coming. He cursed when something cut his hand. He watched as the indentation began to glow green then red. The shield around the niche fell. Harry pulled his hand out of the indentation, took out his wand, and healed the cut on his hand. Putting away his wand, he stepped closer to the niche. Harry grabbed the pensieves and noticed that they, too, had shields surrounding them. Whoever put these here wanted to make sure no one could get them unless he was a Potter.

"There are shields around the pensieves. I assume that the shield is like the one that surrounded the niche and the door," Harry asked.

Ghistpok nodded. "Yes, just add a drop of blood onto the shield and the spell will work."

"Bloody hell, Harry. Whatever is in those pensieves must be important with all the trouble you had getting them," Ron said, looking at the pensieves curiously.

Harry nodded in agreement and put the pensieves carefully into the sack. Harry looked around, but found nothing else that he wanted. He began to walk towards the front of the vault when he heard Ron say, "Wonder what that is?"

Harry turned to look. Ron was facing a small pedestal that had a small light shining on it. Curious, Harry walked forward and glanced down at the pedestal. Lying in a box was a ring. Warily, Harry

reached down for the ring, but there was no shield surrounding the pedestal. Harry gave a sigh of relief, picked up the ring, and looked it over. The platinum ring had a shield engraved on the front -- per quarter argent and gules, first and fourth spread phoenix gules, second and third crowned griffon sergeant argent.⁽¹⁾ The name Potter was carved on a banner above the shield.

Ron looked over his shoulder and exclaimed, "Hey, it's your family ring."

"Family ring?" Harry asked curiously.

"Yeah. Every head of the family line has one. It has your family crest engraved on it, letting the world know that you are the Head of the Potter line. It's used for a number of things such as sealing a letter to opening some doors in your homes. Some things within the Potter line are keyed to that ring. Keep it and put it on. You can cast a Disillusionment charm on it so no one can see it unless you want him or her to. By right, you should've gotten this ring when you entered Hogwarts, but for obvious reasons, you didn't get it. Even though, at the time, you didn't have control over your estate because you were still underage, you still should have gotten that ring, whether you wore it or not," Ron explained.

Harry snarled as he found another thing that the Headmaster had kept from him. He placed the ring on his finger, and felt the warmth of magic spread throughout his body. He had a sense of connection to things that he hadn't had previously.

"Huh, that's weird," Harry said looking at the ring warily.

"What?" Ron asked.

Harry studied the ring before explaining, "It's as if I am aware of things I wasn't aware of previously."

Ron nodded. "You probably are. As I said, certain things are keyed into that ring. Now, you'll know where what they are. If you get close to something that the ring is keyed into, then your ring should get warm to let you know. I'm betting that there are rooms and vaults in

the castle that you couldn't open before that you can open now that you have the ring," the redhead told him.

"Does Arthur Weasley have a ring like this?" Harry asked as he looked over at his brother.

"Yes, all purebloods have one. The Weasleys may be poor, but at one time, they were very wealthy and powerful. The ring and an old house is all that is left of the Weasley legacy. Well, that and the good standing of the of the Weasley line. They are known for being supporters of the light. There hasn't been a dark wizard in the Weasley line for generations. They were once known for never breaking a promise. Guess that's not true anymore," Ron said with a ferocious scowl.

Harry patted Ron on the arm. "True, but you're a Black now. You're also my brother. You don't have to worry about them anymore."

Ron nodded and Harry looked around one more time. "There isn't anything else I need right now. When I've got more time, I'm going to come back and check out the vaults. It's lucky that there's a vault inventory book. I'm going to check it later to see if there's anything we'll need. Now, it's your turn to drool over some money."

Ron grinned in delight. "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go," he exclaimed excitedly.

Harry chuckled as Ron rushed towards the door of the vault. Ghispok was waiting for them and Harry had to admire the goblin's patience. Harry made sure his sack was hidden in his robe pocket before walking out of the inner vault. He watched as the door began to close. When it had shut all the way, it glowed red and Harry could see the shield come back up. He walked out of the vault and saw Ron hopping around excitedly.

"Can we go now?"

Harry grinned at Ron's excitement. "You know if I didn't know that you actually cared for me, I'd think the only reason you wanted to become family was because you wanted my money."

Ron blinked for a second before smirking. "Well, yeah. It's all part of my devious plan and there's nothing you can do about it now. It's permanent," Ron replied with a bright smile on his face.

Harry chuckled and watched as Ron and Ghispok got into the cart. He followed then sat down. He looked over his shoulder at Ron and grinned. "Out of the goodness of my heart, I won't even ask Ghispok to make the cart go faster."

Ron smiled at Harry, a relieved expression on his face. "Thanks."

Harry nodded and turned around. Ghispok was looking at Harry and he grinned at the goblin innocently. Ghispok chuckled and started the cart. They began to move and few minutes later, they were at the Black Family vault.

"Vault 84," Ghispok stated as they came to a stop. They all got out and Harry began to dig around, looking for the key. Luckily, he'd remembered to ask Ron for the keys this morning before they left.

"Key, please," Ghispok requested and Harry gave him the key. "Hey, Ron, remind me to give you that key when we leave here. I won't need it anymore. You can hold onto it for Sirius."

Ron nodded and watched eagerly as the vault door opened. Ghispok stood aside and Ron rushed in. Harry chuckled and followed him. Like the Potter vault, there was another set of doors, but no shields.

Ron looked at it warily before asking, "I'm not going to have to bleed for this door, am I?"

Ghispok shook his head as he said, "No, there is no bleeding involved for this door. The Blacks never implemented the security measures." Harry was sure he heard the goblin mutter 'the cheap bastards' under his breath as the goblin walked by. Ghispok walked over to the door and ran his finger down the seam. The two young men heard several clicks and the door began to open. Lights flared up as the door opened and Ron gaped at the sight of all that money.

Like the Potter vault, the money was on one side and the Black possessions were on the other.

Ron whooped and ran into the vault. He opened up his sack and began throwing money into it. Harry grinned at Ron's antics. Most people would have been concerned about the amount of joy Ron was taking in the money, but Harry knew what it had been like for Ron to grow up without any money. He wasn't concerned with it because he knew that once Ron had gotten use to the idea of having so much money, then he would calm down. Until then, he was going to let Ron have as much fun with it as he could. Harry looked around the vault in interest. There were furniture, portraits, and weapons lining the right side of the vault. He began to walk around, looking idly at some of the items in that the Black family possessed.

He saw a pedestal like the one in the Potter's vault and took a step forward. Sitting on it was a box, which was holding a ring. It looked new and it was smaller than Harry's family ring. The platinum ring had the Black shield engraved on it. It showed murray a sword between two lions counter rampant, two moons increscent in base, all purple. (2) The name Black was engraved along the edge of the shield.

"Hey, Ron, whenever you get a second you need to look at this," Harry yelled to his friend as he examined the ring.

A few minutes later Ron came over. "What?" he asked curiously.

Harry pointed at the ring sitting on the pedestal. "Shouldn't Sirius be wearing that?" he asked.

Ron looked at it thoughtfully. "Yeah, once you put on your family ring, the only way for it to come off is when you die. Family rings grow with a wizard as he grows. This ring is too new. It's still shiny and it's smaller than a family ring. Hey, Ghispok, could you come over here a second?"

The goblin walked over to them and Ron pointed at the ring. "Isn't that a family ring?"

Ghistpok peered at the ring then smiled. "Ah, it seems that the Black line has created a new ring for its new member. The Head of the Black line must really like you. Normally those rings are only created when one is a favored member of the family. The ring will disappear once the wizard or witch dies. The ring is always smaller than the actual family ring. This ring is yours, Mr. Black. It was made specifically for you. Go ahead and put it on."

Ron looked at the ring in awe. "Wow." He picked up the ring carefully and put it on. He looked startled a minute then grinned. "I understand what you meant about being aware of things, Harry. I can't believe Sirius wanted me to have this ring." Ron frowned slightly before saying, "I wonder how he knew that I was the one receiving the ring."

Ghistpok cleared his throat and asked, "If I may explain?" Harry and Ron nodded and the goblin smiled at them. "When the Rite is performed, you are basically ripping out one magical core for another. This is not something to do lightly. During the Rite, you called upon the Powers to help you perform the Rite. The Powers will usually ask the Head of the Family for your acceptance. It will either be granted or denied. If it's granted, then the Head of the Family can choose to allow the ring to be made, if it's denied, then the wizard performing the Rite loses his magic and becomes a squib," the goblin informed him and Ron turned white. He hadn't known about that part of the Rite.

"Sirius Black was probably given a vision of the person asking for the power of his family. Once he saw that it was you and gave his acceptance, he granted to you the power of the Black family line. This ring shows you that acceptance. You have access to everything in this vault and the other three Black vaults. You also have access to the homes, businesses, and legal matters of the family. This ring also gives you the right to head the family in Sirius Black's absence. Until his return, you are technically the Head of the Black family."

Ron looked stunned at the news. He had just thought he would be getting a new name and access to some money, but now it looked like he was getting a lot more than that. It hit him that he suddenly had some power in the Wizarding World. The Blacks were a powerful

pureblood Wizarding family, and he was now a member and a favored member at that.

Harry grinned at Ron's look then looked at Ghispok and asked, "I have a couple of questions. Why would the family ring show up here in the vault, and not in front of Ron at his acceptance into the Black family?"

Ghispok explained that the pedestals were keyed to the family rings. The Rings would automatically come to the pedestal when the Head of the Family died, or if a member of the family had a ring created for them. Most pedestals were kept in the family vaults now, but at one point, they had graced the homes of the great Wizarding families.

"What happened to Ron's former magic? You said that his previous magical core was being traded for another, so what happened to his previous magical core?" Harry asked.

"It was returned to the Weasley line. The magic erased his name from the Family Line and erased anything that pertained to him; books, spells, clocks. It was as if Ron Weasley never existed," Ghispok informed him.

Harry looked at Ghispok sharply. "Will the Weasleys know that the Rite was performed?"

Ghispok nodded and replied, "Yes, every member of the family will now be aware that Mr. Black is no longer part of the family. The magic will have dispersed back into the family."

"Wouldn't that make them more powerful?" Harry asked.

"No, it would give them nothing more than a boost of energy. It doesn't make them anymore powerful, well maybe slightly, but nothing of significance," Ghispok replied.

"So, why is Ron feeling more powerful?" Harry wondered.

Ghispok looked surprised for a second before replying, "I assume it's because the Blacks are magically more powerful than the Weasleys.

The line has had some of the strongest wizards to date. Remember the adoption is not by blood, but by magic. When Sirius Black accepted him, he also gave him the right to use the magic. The powers then transferred the Black magic to his inner core replacing the magic that had been ripped from it. That is why if Sirius Black had not accepted him, young Mr. Black would have been turned into a squib. There would have been no magic to replace what had been taken out."

Harry grunted in understanding then looked over at Ron. "It's a good thing Padfoot likes you."

Ron nodded in agreement still looking a little pale by the news. "Yeah, must have missed that part about the Rite."

"Are you all right?" Harry asked, concerned.

Ron smiled at Harry. "I'm fine," he replied. He looked around the vault thoughtfully before turning back to Harry. "I'm done now. We can leave. I believe I have enough money to last a while and I can explore later when we have some more time."

"Now we go shopping!" Harry chirped excitedly. Ron gave him a look and Harry pouted. "What? Don't tell me you don't look forward to it now that you have some money to spend."

Ron looked excited by that thought. "I do, don't I? Well, then what are we waiting for? Lead the way my good man!"

"Tally ho!" Harry yelled as he ran out of the vault. Ron looked at Ghistpok and sighed. "That is the man that is going to save us from You Know Who and Dumbledore," Ron said dramatically. "We are so screwed."

Ghistpok chuckled and began to walk with Ron towards the front of the vault. Ron waited while Ghistpok closed and locked the inner vault doors. He left the vault and entered the large cavern, where he Harry already in the cart, bouncing around excitedly.

"Hurry up, let's go. I have money to spend."

Ron and Ghistpok got into the cart and Harry smiled at the goblin wickedly. Ghistpok understood the look and smirked. He started the cart and pushed the button. Ron's screams could be heard miles away.

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I took the description of the shields off the internet and added some of my own ideas to it. The colors of the shields also have some meaning. I also thank Nancy so much for the help with the shields. She knows more about it than I do.

Or, in other words, the phoenix with wings spread (and legs, btw) is red on silver in the upper left and lower right corners. A crowned, standing griffin is in the opposite corners in silver on red.

Argent, white or silver - Peace and sincerity.

Gules or red - Military fortitude and magnanimity.

Griffin - Sets forth the property of a valorous soldier whose magnanimity is such that he will dare all dangers, and even death itself, rather than become captive.

Quarter - Bearing of honor. Similar to the Canton.

Crown - Royal or seigniorial authority.

Phoenix - Resurrection.

It showed a maroon shield with two lions standing on their back legs with a sword raised up right in the middle. There were two crescent moons carved under the standing lions. The charges are all in purple. (Charges, lions, swords and crescent moons)

Lion - The lion is the most popular beast in heraldry - Deathless courage.

Rampant - (ramp'-ant) Said of a beast of prey, as a lion, rising with fore paws in the air., as if attacking.

COUNTER RAMPANT - Said of two animals rampant in opposite directions. (Sometimes used to denote a beast rampant toward sinister.)

Sword - The sword of heraldry is two handed. - Indicates the bearer to a just and generous pursuit of honor and virtue in warlike deeds.

Moon - The moon in heraldry is always borne as a crescent, usually with the cavity upward. When the cavity is toward the dexter side of the shield, it is increscent; when toward the sinister, decrescent. -

Serene power over mundane actions

Purpure, purple - Royal majesty, sovereignty and justice.

Murray, or sanguine - Not hasty in battle, and yet a victor.

SPELLS

Elevo Saccus - lighten sack

Securitas -security

Aes Signatum Mensura - coined money amount

CHAPTER TWELVE

Ron staggered up the steps to the inner part of the bank. He was glaring at the innocent looking Harry. "What? I didn't do anything," Harry protested.

"I hate you!" Ron hissed. His face was still a little green and Harry held in a snicker. "I didn't say a word to Ghispok. It was all his idea. Isn't that right, Ghispok?"

"Of course, Mr. Potter," the goblin replied smoothly, amusement dancing in his eyes.

"See!" Harry retorted.

Ron growled and walked past them, ignoring the snickering he could hear coming from Harry. He hated it when Harry got bored since he was normally on the receiving end of any prank or adventure that Harry thought up. As they walked into the large room, Harry heard a goblin yelling for Ghispok. Harry turned towards the goblin and smiled. "It was a pleasure doing business with you, Ghispok."

"And you as well, Mr. Potter. May the powers grant you more gold," Ghispok intoned with a small bow.

"And you as well, Ghispok. I'll see you later," Harry replied and stuck out his hand and Ghispok took it. They shook, and with a respectful nod towards Ron, Ghispok turned, and walked off.

Harry and Ron watched him leave then Harry turned towards Ron. "I like that goblin. He's nice. Come on Ron, let's get out of here. I need to get an owl and some clothes." As they were walking towards the entrance of the bank Harry paused, turned, and glanced around. He suddenly smiled then in a loud voice he called out, "Bye, Susie! You take care now. Remember not to lie about your name anymore."

Glixx looked up at the name and he snarled when he saw Harry waving at him. Ron began to laugh and they walked out of the bank together. They went down the stairs and paused at the bottom step.

"Now where to?" Ron asked.

"I need some clothes, and then I need to get another owl. Hedwig is too recognizable and we can't use Dobby for everything."

"All right, lead on."

Harry looked at him with a smile. "You know you can buy things too. Merlin knows you have enough money. Why don't you get something for yourself? Make it extravagant, something you always wanted, but could never afford to get. Indulge yourself, my friend."

Ron looked surprised for a moment before he grinned. "Huh...I forgot about that. I'm so use to not having money that I forget I have some now. I'll have to think about what to get."

Harry smiled happily, grabbed Ron by his shirt, and began skipping down the road.

"Come on Ron, sing it with me," Harry said excitedly and the redhead looked on in horror as Harry began to sing at the top of his lungs.

"Follow the Yellow Brick Road. Follow the Yellow Brick Road.

Follow, follow, follow, follow,

Follow the Yellow Brick Road.

Follow the Yellow Brick, Follow the Yellow Brick,

Follow the Yellow Brick Road.

We're off to see the Wizard, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

You'll find he is a whiz of a Wiz! If ever a Wiz! there was.

If ever oh ever a Wiz! there was The Wizard of Oz is one because,

Because, because, because, because, because.

Because of the wonderful things he does.

We're off to see the Wizard. The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," Harry warbled with a light baritone voice.

Ron was beginning to think that the months in Azkaban might have screwed Harry up. Of course, he could just be happy that he was out of Azkaban and that his godfather was alive. Whatever the cause, it was making Harry act a little quirky. Ron sighed in resignation and followed Harry down the street. If he could put up with the twins, he could surely put up with Harry.

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Elizabeth Cameron leaned back in her chair after her talk with Dumbledore. She had been expecting his call ever since she learned that the youngest Weasley wanted to have the Rite performed. She knew that Dumbledore had not been happy when he had lost his control over Harry Potter. Her spy in the Order had commented that Dumbledore had been livid at the news of the youngest Weasley's departure from Hogwarts, taking Potter and a house-elf with him.

Lizzie had laughed herself sick when she heard the news. Too bad William was dead. She had a feeling that he would've liked his grandson's best friend. She sighed wistfully then frowned at the thought of William Potter. In 1907, just after graduating Hogwarts, she had met a wonderful older man and fell in love. He had been forty-nine years older than her, but she hadn't cared. She remembered how she would get lost in his twinkling blue eyes and things would just disappear around her. She had thought she had found her prince charming. She had been wrong.

For over a year, she had dated Albus Dumbledore and it had been wonderful, but then things had started to change. He kept missing their dates, and then his personality started to change. He became more controlling and his manner had become harsher. It was a couple years later that he had hit her for the first time. She had been shocked and so apparently had he. He had apologized profusely and Lizzie let it go, thinking it had been a one time thing. It hadn't and whenever he got gruff, she knew that he was going to hit her. She

kept hoping that he would change, that he would turn back into the man she had fell in love with, but he never did.

The last straw came after she came home from work and found Albus beating up a whore. She watched in shock as he starting spitting in rage at the woman. She had stunned him, took the poor woman out of the house, and sent her to St. Mungos. After that, she'd packed up all her things and left. She finally realized that behind the happy, kind facade beat a heart of an evil man.

She had been devastated, but relieved after she had left. She couldn't imagine what her life would have been like if she had stayed with him. She'd already wasted five years on a man who didn't love her. For years, she had watched as Dumbledore gained more power in the Wizarding World. Everyone believed that Albus Dumbledore was a kind, benevolent man and she had tried to tell people what the man was really like, but they all scoffed at her, believing her to be a bitter woman. She eventually learned not to say anything. Thirty-three years later, Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald and Lizzie watched with dread as the man gained even more power.

Several years later, she had been approached by a couple of gentlemen who had been watching Dumbledore for years. They had offered her a position in a very secret group created to investigate Dumbledore. They had noticed that some very suspicious activities happened around him. They had yet to find anything to prove his involvement, but they were still watching diligently. Years later, when there had been talk of another Dark Lord rising, everyone had looked towards Dumbledore to save them.

The Watchers, as the group called themselves, had been lucky in finding the perfect agent. William James Harold Potter had joined the group after being convinced of Dumbledore's true nature. He had eventually found something that would've been detrimental to Dumbledore, but he had an "accident" before he could tell anyone what it was. The night before he had died, Lizzie received a note from him telling her that if anything happened to him, he had hidden the information and only his heir could find it. The group suffered a major setback with the loss of William. They were certain that Dumbledore had killed Potter, but they could never prove it. They began watching

James Potter carefully in hopes that Dumbledore wouldn't harm the boy.

When James Potter died, the group had been devastated. They had never approached James to retrieve the information that his father had hidden as he was too close to Dumbledore. When they found out that Harry Potter had lived and defeated Voldemort, they had feared for the boy. Lizzie knew that Dumbledore would not take kindly to a loss in status. The Wizarding World had a new hero, and it was no longer Dumbledore.

But it looked like as if Dumbledore had other plans for the boy. The Watchers had watched as Dumbledore gained control over the boy's estate. He had then placed the boy with his Muggle relatives with hopes of controlling the boy. They had been horrified to realize that Dumbledore planned to regain control of the Wizarding World by controlling the new hero. The first several years at Hogwarts showed a Harry Potter that had been submissive to Dumbledore. Then Sirius Black died and Harry Potter began to break away from Dumbledore's control. The group had sighed with relief. Then the murders happened and Harry Potter had been thrown into Azkaban.

The Watchers couldn't do a thing to help. They had looked for evidence to prove the boys innocence, but they had found nothing. There had even been talk of breaking him out of Azkaban, but it never came to fruition. When the Ministry arrested the Malfoys and they had confessed to the murders, the Watchers celebrated. Though saddened by the news of young Harry Potter's condition, it still gave them hope for the future. They needed to find the evidence that William Potter had gathered because if what Lizzie's spy said was true, then Dumbledore was losing patience with Harry and Ron, and things were going to get ugly fast. Lizzie had laughed herself silly when her spy told her about the contract that Dumbledore had unwittingly signed. To know that a couple of fifteen year-old teenagers had outsmarted Dumbledore did the Watchers spirits a great deal of good. Lizzie had gotten a lot of enjoyment over it.

The fact that another Weasley had broken away from Dumbledore had also helped. There had been talk about approaching Ronald Bilius Weasley, now known as Ron Black, but no one could find him.

Wherever Ron had hidden Potter and himself, he had done an excellent job.

She remembered the shock she had felt when she had found out that Ron had gone through with the Rite. Like the others, she hadn't believed he would do it even if Percy had insisted that he would. When Percy was informed of the abuse that his brother had gone through, he insisted that there was no way that Ron would stay with the family. Lizzie had been skeptical until Percy had stumbled into her office earlier today.

FLASHBACK

Percy came stumbling into her office, looking haggard and pale. Lizzie looked at him, concerned, and watched as the young man threw himself into the chair across from her desk.

"Percy, dear boy, are you alright?" she asked, her intense brown eyes looking him over.

"Ron went through with the Rite," the pale man said.

She looked at him, her expression shocked. "What? How?" she exclaimed.

Percy winced as he moved in the chair. "I received a portion of his magic about an hour ago. I was sitting on the couch, reading a magazine when I looked up and noticed a small red ball of energy forming in my living room. It was still for a few minutes before it pulsed, shattered, and entered my body. The bloody thing knocked me unconscious. I was out for a good forty-five minutes. I think I hit my head on the way down because it hurts dreadfully and there's a knot on the side of my head," Percy said ruefully, rubbing his head. "I came over here as soon as I could to let you know. I thought Dumbledore was going to try to delay things as much as he could. You haven't received the paperwork, have you?" he asked.

Lizzie shook her head, a puzzled look on her face. "No, nothing has come through this office about your brother's Rite," she said. There was a pop and sitting on her desk was a rolled up parchment. She

looked at Percy with an arched eyebrow. "Speak of the devil," she quipped and unrolled the parchment. She read the parchment and started to laugh. She looked over at Percy, a grin on her face. "He had it done at Gringotts. That boy had the Goblins perform the Rite. He didn't wait for Dumbledore to file the paperwork. Oh, I'll be expecting a call later today. This is great. Your former brother got another one past Dumbledore," she said and started to laugh uproariously.

"Huh," Percy muttered. "I wonder how he knew to use the Goblins for the Rite. I thought that was an obscure law that hardly anyone knew about."

Lizzie looked thoughtful. "It may be an obscure law, but you can find about it if you read the right documents. Your brother is a very smart young man," she commented with a smile.

Percy snorted at that. "Ron would hate for you to tell him that. So, what's his name?" Percy asked curiously..

"Normally I wouldn't give anyone that information, but since you're a fellow member of the Watchers, I'll let you know. His name is Ron Black."

"Black? But how?" Percy asked, bewildered.

"You know that Sirius Black was Potter's godfather. Well, when he died, Potter inherited everything; the name, the money, the businesses, the voting rights under the Black's name. As Head of the Black line he would have the right to give Ron the name."

"That's great, but I thought with Harry's condition, he wouldn't be able to give Ron the permission he needed to do the Rite," Percy inquired, confused.

Lizzie paused as she considered the question. She began to grin then chuckle. "Those sly dogs."

"What?" Percy asked.

"Harry Potter is no less aware of his surroundings than I am. He had to have been faking it. What better way to fool everyone. If Dumbledore isn't aware of Potter's true state, then he won't be fighting as hard as he could be to find Potter. Right now he thinks that Potter is catatonic and he thinks that gives him some time to plan," she told him with a gleeful smile.

"If Harry is awake and aware of Dumbledore's shenanigans, then he can plan too. Do you think he is aware of Dumbledore's true nature?" Percy asked.

Lizzie nodded thoughtfully, tapping her lips with her finger. "Yes, I think he knows. The proof is in the fact that at fifteen, he had Dumbledore sign a contract disguised to look like something else. He also made Ron his caretaker should something go wrong. From what my spy tells me, Ron is no longer enamored of the Headmaster. Apparently, your family didn't approve of his support for Harry. They treated him badly, Percy. There were beatings from the twins and he was belittled by every member of the family. He was ignored, and treated rather cruelly, I was told."

Percy looked livid at that information. He had already been told, but it still angered him to know that his family had been so cruel to one of their own. He shouldn't really be surprised. Looked how they had turned on him when he didn't agree with Dumbledore. He shook his head, resigned to the fact that his family was too much under Dumbledore's thumb to think for themselves. He hoped he had a chance with Ron.

"Apparently he is no longer friends with Granger either," she informed him, watching for Percy's reaction.

Percy grimaced at the name. It was a well-known fact in the Watchers that Percy never liked his brother's friend. He found her know-it-all attitude to be annoying. Percy had his role to play, and while he had to act stuck up and annoying, he couldn't stand people who were truly like that. Percy had broken away from his family when it had come to his attention that the Weasley's were a little too close to Dumbledore.

Percy had realized that Dumbledore controlled his family, even if the rest of them couldn't see it. Dumbledore needed the reputation of the Weasley name to keep him looking good since everyone knew that the Weasleys were a family of only light wizards and witches. It hurt Lizzie to see what the pain of being away from his family caused Percy, but it had been the young man's choice. He needed to be able to do his job without his family reporting everything to Dumbledore.

"Percy, have you thought about approaching Ron?" Lizzie asked.

Percy nodded his head. "Yeah, both him and Harry. I know that technically Ron is no longer my brother, but I still consider him one. If there is even a remote chance that Ron is no longer under Dumbledore's control, then I want to talk to him. I want to let him know that he has a least one Weasley in his corner."

"If you get a chance, then take it," Lizzie said. "We have no idea where they are at right now, but if you spot him, then take the opportunity to talk to him. Let them both know that there are people out there willing to help them. They are not alone in their fight against Dumbledore or Voldemort."

Percy nodded in understanding and got up to leave. "I'll talk to you later, Lizzie."

Lizzie watched as the young man left her office. She wrote a note to the heads of the Watcher group to let them know that about Ron's Rite. She was distracted out of her thoughts when she heard her name. Ah, just the jackass I have waiting for. She sighed and answered Dumbledore's call.

END FLASHBACK

She hadn't been too worried about Dumbledore's threats. She was 109 years old and while that was still young for a witch, she had lived a full life. She wasn't afraid of death. She just didn't want to die before Dumbledore was taken down. She had hopes that young Potter and Black would be up to the task. She just hoped that she was there when it happened. Until then, she would do what she could to help them.

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Harry and Ron entered the castle exhausted beyond belief. Harry more so than Ron since he still hadn't healed fully from his stint in Azkaban. Harry yawned widely and glanced over at Ron. "Is it dinner time yet? I'm starved."

"I sure hope so. I could eat a hippogriff," the redhead replied as his stomach began to growl.

Harry snorted, amused. "You better not let Buckbeak hear you say that." The hippogriff had been released back into the wild after Sirius's death. It was the least Harry could've done for the animal that had kept Sirius company.

They made their way into the game room. They sat down on the couch and yawned again.

Harry called for Dobby. The house-elf popped into the room and he had a large smile on his face. "Harry Potter and Wheezy is back."

Harry sighed and looked at Dobby sternly. "What did I tell you earlier, Dobby?" he asked. "Call me Harry."

"Dobby will try Harry, sir. How was Harry and Wheezy's day?" he asked.

"Exhausting, yet informative. How did things go with Snape?"

Dobby gave Harry Snape's note. He read it and smirked. "Thank you, Dobby. Is there something wrong?" Harry asked the nervous looking house-elf.

"Dobby did something that Harry might not like, but the Headmaster deserved it," Dobby stated firmly while fidgeting nervously.

That comment caught Harry and Ron's attention. "What did you do, Dobby?"

Dobby began to wring his hands in agitation. "Dobby threw the Headmaster against the wall with his magic and knocked him unconscious. Dobby was not pleased with the Headmaster. The Headmaster tried to hurt Dobby, but Dobby is a free elf now. Dobby doesn't need a stick to work his magic." Harry looked intrigued, and Ron looked positively gleeful.

"Dobby, why don't you tell us what happened," Harry requested.

Dobby nodded and began to his tale of his visit to Snape's office. When he finished, Ron was on the floor laughing hysterically. Dobby looked at the grinning Harry and relaxed; he obviously wasn't in trouble. Ron couldn't breathe and he was holding his stomach.

"Dobby, how come you didn't just disappear when the Headmaster came to Snape's room?" Harry asked. "You know as well as I do that he never would have even known you were even there."

Dobby began to look shifty. "Uh, Dobby wanted to help Snape?" he said making it sound like a question. Harry looked at the house-elf suspiciously. "Dobby?" he asked sternly.

Dobby stood up straight and looked him right in the eye. "Dobby needed to teach the Headmaster his place. He needed to know that Dobby protects Harry and Wheezy. Headmaster knows this now. Besides, Dobby had fun," he said with a feral grin.

Harry couldn't hold it any longer. He burst into laughter at Dobby's smug tone. He fell back into the couch and laughed. A few minutes later, he finally calmed down. "Oh, Dobby, you're priceless. I'll have to make sure that I ask Snape what Dumbledore's reaction was to being shown up by a house-elf."

Ron looked amused and glanced at Dobby. "Next time Dobby, make sure I'm there," he said. "I would've loved to have seen that."

Dobby grinned at Ron. "Dobby wills Wheezy."

"Ron and I would like something to eat. Please serve it here, as I'm feeling too lazy to get up and go to the dining room. I'm going to go to

bed early tonight. I'm still not exactly in the best of shape right now." Dobby nodded and disappeared.

"I think the best thing you could have done was free Dobby," Ron said with a snicker.

Harry laughed in agreement. "Yes, indeed. That image will keep me entertained for years. I'll have to be sure to get the image from Snape so that I can watch it. I also want to share it with Sirius if we ever find him."

Dobby popped back in with some food. He transfigured a footstool into a table and laid down the tray.

"I know, Harry. That old mutt would love it. Your godfather was always one for pranks," Ron said.

Dobby froze a second and gave Ron a sharp glance. Harry noted Dobby's odd behavior, but ignored it. "Are you kidding? Sirius would kill for a chance to see Dumbledore taken down by a house-elf. I hope to show him soon, but I have no idea where Dumbledore has him. He could be anywhere," Harry sighed.

"Well, obviously he can't transform into his animagus form and escape, or else he would've done it, so wherever he's being held has to be warded. Merlin, Harry, he could be at any of Dumbledore's holdings. I'm positive that not all of them are known," Ron said with a frown.

Harry nodded unhappily, leaning back on the couch. "And if that old mutt can't be found, then you know the Fidelius spell is being used, plus Dumbledore's home is probably unplotable."

"Dobby is begging Harry's pardon, but why is Harry calling his godfather a mutt?" Dobby asked curiously.

Harry glanced at the house-elf and noticed that Dobby was looking at him intently. Bewildered by Dobby's odd behavior he answered, "It's an affectionate name I call him. You know that his animagus form is a black dog, right?" Dobby nodded. "Well, I started calling him mutt

after I heard the Headmaster calling him that. Of course, now that I think about it, he wasn't saying it affectionately at the time."

Dobby nodded in understanding. "Does Harry need anything else? Dobby has an errand to take care of."

Harry and Ron shook their heads. "Go ahead. I'll have Sage clear this up. You go ahead and do whatever you need to do." Dobby thanked him then disappeared.

"Was it just me or was Dobby acting a little odd? Well, odder than normal," Ron inquired.

"I was just about to ask you the same question. Who knows what's going on? Dobby has become a different elf since he gave me that oath. Personally, I like it."

Harry finished his dinner and yawned. He leaned back against the back of the couch and sighed. "I'm knackered. I think I'm going up to bed now. I'm beyond exhausted. Are you going to be all right by yourself?"

Ron was still eating, but he waved Harry off. Ron swallowed his food and answered, "Go ahead. I think I'll explore the castle later, then maybe use that new chess set I bought today. By the way, where is that new owl of yours?" Harry had bought a brown barn owl. It was small and nondescript. It would hardly catch anyone's attention. Harry had named her Amber after her large amber eyes. "I sent her to owlrey. You can use her if you need to."

"Thanks, but there isn't anyone I need to owl. Go to bed, you look tired."

Harry nodded and stood up. He swayed for a second then left the room. He made his way up to his room, entered it, and headed for his bed. He sat down, took off his shoes and clothes, leaving him only in his boxers. He took off his glasses and laid them down on the nightstand next to the bed. With a large yawn, he got under the blankets and lay down. Harry glanced out the window and looked at

the starry sky. "Goodnight, Sirius. We'll find you soon." Harry closed his eyes and was asleep in seconds.

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Dobby popped into the kitchen at Hogwarts and looked around. He found Winky sitting on a chair, looking depressed.

He walked over to her and poked her. She looked up at him in surprise then squealed. She threw herself at Dobby and he caught her.

"Winky so glad to see Dobby. Winky has been sad that Dobby is gone."

Dobby pulled back from Winky and asked, "How is mutt?"

Winky's eyes filled up with tears and she began to sob. "Winky is so sad. Dumbly ordered Winky to feed mutt only once a day. Mutt can only have gruel and water. Mutt will die!" she wailed.

"Winky, Dobby must ask you a question. What does mutt look like?" Dobby asked.

"Mutt is tall, with black hair and blue eyes. Mutt is very nice to Winky. Sometimes he plays with Winky as a doggie. Winky likes Mutt. Winky doesn't want Mutt to die," she said in agitation.

Dobby looked grim. "Dobby needs to talk to Winky. It is important. Dobby must ask for oath of silence from Winky."

Winky blinked at him, her expression surprised. Asking for an oath of silence meant it was extremely important. It was the one of the few things that the Wizards couldn't overcome, not that they even knew about it.

"Winky gives Dobby oath of silence." They both felt the magic of the oath flow over them.

"Dobby knows a way to save mutt. Mutt is Harry Potter's godfather. Harry not knows where mutt is. Winky knows, but is bonded to Headmaster. If Winky were to leave something lying around telling Dobby where mutt is, Dobby can save mutt."

Winky blinked at him then grinned. "Winky can do this. Mutt must be saved. Harry Potter is a good wizard. Dumbly must pay for forcing personal bond on Winky. Dumbly shall lose Mutt," she said adamantly.

The two house-elves grinned at each other, both understanding that Dumbledore was a bad wizard and he must pay.

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Sirius looked out into the night sky and sighed mournfully. It had been little over two years since he last saw his godson and he missed him dearly. Dumbledore, the damn bastard, wouldn't tell him anything about Harry.

Winky had been forbidden to speak to him about Harry, but she had managed to leave a couple of newspapers lying around when he had first been locked up. Sadly, Dumbledore found out and punished Winky, forbidding her to even talk to Sirius. Again, they had found a way around that and Winky talked to him when he was in his dog form. She still couldn't speak of Harry, but she did tell him about other things that were going on. He was grateful. He would have gone mad if he hadn't had someone to talk to. His twelve years in Azkaban had made him dislike being by himself. He was a people person and being alone was slowly driving him mad.

Winky had come by earlier and had been wailing. He had transformed into Padfoot and she cried over him. She had informed him that he would only be eating once a day and only then, it would be gruel and water. He had come to the realization that the Headmaster was going to kill him slowly.

He must have lost control over Harry, he thought. Why else would he risk killing me? He doesn't need me anymore, but he doesn't want to kill me right away in case he can use me later. I hope that Remus is

taking care of Harry. He had better because if I ever get out of here and find out otherwise, there will be hell to pay.

Sirius gasped as he heard Harry's voice in the room. "Goodnight, Sirius. We'll find you soon." Sirius looked around, but found nothing. He thought for a moment then began to smile slowly. Harry knew he was alive and he would stop at nothing to save him. Sirius shrugged to himself, or you could be losing your ever-loving mind. Either way for the first time in two years, Sirius had hope that soon his time here would be over.

Then he would make the Headmaster pay for ever locking him up. "Soon, Dumbledore, soon," he whispered angrily, his eyes glowing blue with rage.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A couple of days after Harry's visit to his vault and Ron's rite, Harry could still feel himself grinning foolishly at the thought of finally having a brother. He'd always thought of Ron as family, but now it was official. He was skimming through Quidditch Monthly while waiting for Dobby to show up with Professor Snape. He didn't know what was going to happen today, but he had a feeling that it was going to be big. Harry couldn't get past the feeling that this meeting with Severus was important to his future.

Dobby had been acting rather strangely in the last couple of days, but he wouldn't tell Harry what was going on. He seemed to have many errands to run. Ron had commented that maybe Dobby had a girlfriend, but somehow Harry didn't think that was it. There had been a couple of times when he thought Dobby was going to tell him what was going on, but Dobby always seemed to change his mind. Harry respected the house-elf's privacy, but it was hard to ignore the odd behavior.

It had been a peaceful couple of days. The only crisis had been when Hedwig met Harry's new owl, Amber. She had not been happy, so to appease Hedwig, Harry gave Amber to Ron. Hedwig settled down, and now she got along famously with Amber. Apparently, she didn't want to share Harry after such a long separation.

Thinking of Hedwig made him think of Hagrid. He wanted to write him a letter, but he knew that Hagrid was not a person capable of keeping secrets. As much as he cared for Hagrid, he wasn't quite ready for people to know his true condition. He would have Ron write a letter letting Hagrid know that whenever Harry got better they would come to visit. Harry was startled out of his wandering thoughts by Ron.

"Oi! Harry, did you know that they are talking about releasing a broom that vibrates? It's supposed to massage your thighs so that they don't hurt after a long hard game. It's supposed to be very relaxing. Funny enough, it's very popular with female players. I wonder why? They've named it the Eppy2000. Maybe I should get one now that I can afford it. There is nothing better than something relaxing between my thighs as I ride my broom."

Harry stared at the oblivious Ron. Did he really not understand what he just said, or was Harry's mind actually that naughty? A vibrating broom and Ron had to wonder why it was popular with the ladies?

"Hey, they even have some attachments for it! I wonder what the stick looking thing is. Why would they want something like that attached to a vibrating broom? It just doesn't make sense," Ron said looking at the Quidditch magazine intently.

Harry's eyes widened in disbelief -- attachments? What the hell was Ron reading? "Wow the broom comes with two setting too, vibrating and pulsating. Um...interesting."

Harry shook his head, why couldn't Ron see just how...naughty that broom was. "Ron, what the hell are you reading?"

Ron looked up at him blankly. It was apparent that his mind was still on the article. Harry waved towards the magazine. "That? What's that you're reading?"

Ron looked down at the magazine. "It's called Boys and Their Toys. It's quite interesting. Of course, I've only read this article."

Harry looked at his best friend, his brother, his only family member, well besides Sirius, and just stared. Ron seemed to feel Harry's gaze and looked up. "What?"

"Boys and Their Toys?" Harry asked slowly.

"Yea, why?" Ron asked, with confused.

"Ron, you twit, that's an adult magazine for sex toys. Remember, Seamus had one just before they threw me into Azkaban. We made fun of the damn thing. We all sat around on my bed and read the articles, snickering the whole time."

"It is not! I don't remember doing that," Ron said.

Harry sighed and closed his eyes. The memory of that day came back to him and he realized that Ron hadn't been there. It had only been Neville, Dean, Seamus and him. Ron had been off with Hermione doing Merlin knows what.

Opening his eyes, he looked at Ron. "I apologize. You weren't there, but still. That is an adult sex toy magazine."

"Then why are they selling brooms?" Ron asked, confused.

Harry groaned and covered his face with his hands. "You have got to be kidding me. Damnit, Ron," he said with exasperation and put his hands down to look at his friend.

Ron had tears rolling down his face, which was red from holding in his laughter. When he saw Harry's gaze, he cracked up. He started to laugh and Harry watched him, confused as to what was going on. A few minutes later, Ron finally calmed down enough to talk.

"Oi, Harry, your face. You should've seen your face. Merlin, that was funny," Ron told him with a wicked grin.

Harry threw a cushion at Ron. "You prat! I thought you were being serious. I've been in Azkaban for the last eighteen months, and even I know that a vibrating broom is odd. Jerk!"

Ron began to laugh again and Harry growled. He jumped up and pounced on his best friend and they began to wrestle. The room filled with laughter and yelps as they played. Ron finally had Harry pinned to the floor and was sitting on him, crowing with victory.

"Let me up, you lardass. You're not exactly light you know. Ow, Ron that hurt," Harry hollered.

"I'll let you up if you say that I am a god among men. Come on say it! I...am...a..."

"Snape," Harry said.

Ron looked down at Harry, his face outraged. "The hell you say! That's not what you were supposed to say. I am a god, not a Snape. Why did you say Snape?"

"Maybe it was the fact that I'm standing behind you, Mr. Black?" a smooth voice stated behind Ron.

Ron yelped in surprise and Harry took the opportunity to knock Ron off him. He stood up and looked at his gob-smacked friend. Harry smirked at Ron. "Serves you right, you prat," he said smugly.

Professor Snape bent down and picked up the magazine that had fallen when they had started to wrestle. He gave Harry an arched look and Harry grinned at him. "That belongs to Ron. Why just earlier he was all agog about the vibrating broom. I think he even plans to get one now that he can afford it. Isn't that right, Ron?"

Ron blushed bright red and began to stammer. "I was only reading it for the articles."

Snape gave him a looked. "Hmm...I'm certain. That's what I would do with a sex toy magazine. Really Mr. Black, couldn't you come up with a better excuse?"

"I'm serious. They have some bloody good articles," Ron retorted, looking quite flustered.

Harry snickered at how uncomfortable Ron looked. Snape glanced at him quickly and Harry could've sworn he saw the man's mouth twitch with amusement. Snape glanced back over at Ron. "Indeed?" he inquired, his face blank. However, if one looked closely, they could see amusement dancing in his eyes.

Ron got up from the floor and grabbed the magazine from Snape's hand. He glared at them, then sniffed indignantly. "I'm going to take my magazine and myself out of this room and go somewhere where we'll be appreciated," he declared and stalked towards the door.

"Let me know how that goes, would you!" Harry called out and Ron raised a hand and flipped him off.

Harry snickered, then turned towards Snape. His former Potions Professor did not look good. He looked very tired and worn out. There were lines of pain around his mouth and eyes. "Would you like to sit down?"

Snape sat in the chair that Harry had motioned to and sighed gratefully. He leaned back wearily, and closed his eyes, taking the opportunity to just rest. The last several days had been hard on him. The Headmaster had not been in a good mood and he had taken it out on Severus. Dumbledore was seriously pissed off now that he had no way of controlling Ron Weasley since he had become Ron Black. He had been livid and Severus couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction at the setbacks Dumbledore had been having.

"Are you all right, Professor?" Harry asked, concerned.

Snape opened his eyes and gave Harry a weary smile. "I'm fine, Mr. Potter. It's been a long couple of days."

"Did you have any problems getting away from Hogwarts? I hope the Headmaster wasn't suspicious of where you were going."

"The weekends are usually my own since the Headmaster is usually away on Ministry business. Sometimes he needs me, but not often," Snape explained.

"Are you interested in some lunch?" Harry asked.

"Please, and a cup of tea would do nicely," Snape said wearily.

"Sage," Harry called out and Sage appeared before him.

"You called, Sir?" she inquired.

"Yes, if you would be so kind as to get lunch for Professor Snape and myself. We would also like some tea. Oh, and you might as well bring Ron's lunch here too, because he can smell food from miles away," Harry said.

"Of course, Harry. I would be glad to," Sage answered before disappearing.

Harry looked over at Snape and saw an unexplainable look on his face. Wondering what it meant, he decided to ignore it for now. If Snape wanted him to know what was going on in his mind, he would let Harry know.

"How are you doing, Mr. Potter? Are you taking your potions?" Snape asked politely.

Harry smiled at him. "Please, call me, Harry," he requested. "I'm no longer your student and yes, I'm taking my potions. Dobby and Ron are quite insistent that I take them. I must say that I feel better now."

A small smile flickered over Snape's face. "Good. I brought you some more energy potions. You do not have to take them every day, but use them when you need to. It will probably take a little while longer before you have recovered from your stay in Azkaban. And though it pains me to say this, you may call me Severus," he said with sardonic humor.

Harry grinned at Severus. "Thank you, Severus. I must say that I was surprised that you let us go when we left Hogwarts."

Severus frowned slightly. "You are of age, and Mr. Black is your caretaker. Why shouldn't you leave?"

"I figured you would've told Dumbledore, since he is your...boss now," Harry answered hesitantly.

Severus snorted. "That's putting it mildly," he stated.

Harry shrugged apologetically then frowned. "How did you know that Ron is now a Black?" he asked with narrowed eyes.

"I asked your house-elf when he came to the castle several days ago. For some reason, he felt he could trust me with the information," Severus said with a slight frown.

Harry nodded thoughtfully and said, "Dobby is a good judge of character. If he felt he could trust you then I can as well. I trust Dobby to do what's right."

Severus looked at him and said, "Yes, about your elf," he began.

Harry interrupted him with a frown, "Dobby is not my elf. He's a free elf and belongs to no one but himself. He chooses to stay with Ron and me."

Severus gave him a small nod of acknowledgement. "Of course. About Dobby then, how did he become so powerful?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm afraid that's not something I can explain to you. If Dobby feels that he can trust you, then he'll let you know. It's not my secret to tell."

Severus looked at him with an unreadable expression before sighing. "Then can you at least tell me how he threw the Headmaster against the wall and knocked him unconscious? No house-elf I've ever seen would do something like that. It goes against their bonds. I have never seen such an aggressive house-elf before. Also, Sage, she called you by your name and talked differently than any other house-elf I have ever heard," he said.

Harry grinned at him, "Oh yes, Dobby told me about that. I have to admit that the image of Dumbledore flying through the air and being knocked unconscious with a snap of a finger from an insignificant house-elf, amused me."

Severus flashed a Harry a grin. "Oh, it was amusing. After the Headmaster left my room and I got over the shock, I'm afraid I laughed myself silly."

Harry grinned at him and said, "Silly? You, sir?"

"Yes, me. Sadly, there have not been things to laugh about lately but I did enjoy that one small moment. Now, please explain," Severus commanded with a small frown.

Harry rolled his eyes at Severus' tone. "Simple, Dobby and Sage are free elves. Dobby's magic is no longer bound so he can use it however he wishes. Dobby has always been an unusual house-elf," he explained.

"So Dobby being free made him powerful?" Severus asked.

Harry shook his head. "No, it just freed the magic he already had. What made him more powerful isn't something I can tell you without Dobby's permission. It's a secret," he told the Potions Master in an exaggerated whisper.

Severus rolled his eyes, exasperated at Harry's antics. "Very well. I will not ask again."

"Thanks."

Sage appeared with the tea set and placed it on the table before them. She glanced at Harry and asked, "Minky wants to know if you want bagels with your lunch. She has made some fresh strawberry bagels for you enjoyment."

Harry shook his head. "I don't want any." He looked over at Severus and asked, "Would you like some?"

"Yes, actually I would," Severus replied.

Harry nodded and glanced over at Sage. "Please get Professor Severus some and you might as well bring several for Ron. You know how he loves his bagels."

Sage nodded and disappeared. A few moments later, she was back with lunch. She placed it on the table next to the tea set and nodded towards Harry and Severus. "Can I get you two anything else?"

Harry looked over at Severus and the man shook his head. Glancing back at Sage, he replied, "No, that should do it for now. Thank you, Sage."

Sage nodded then disappeared. Severus stared at the spot where Sage disappeared and sighed.

"Problem, Severus?" Harry asked.

Severus shook his head. "No, I'm just getting used to the idea of free elves. I've never heard of such a thing," he answered.

"You probably won't either. My ancestor freed the house-elves that worked for this castle. They've lived as free elves for years. When we first came here, Sage pretended to talk as Dobby does now, afraid of the new Master of the Castle. She had never seen a previously bound elf before, only heard of them, and she was afraid that Dobby would still be treated as a slave. It only took her a couple days to realize that Dobby was just as free as her, if not more, and that we were his friends, not Masters. Once she realized that, she started acting as you see her now. Ron and I were delighted of course. I also think it made Dobby's day as well. I think he thought he was the only free elf in the whole Wizarding World," Harry explained.

"Mmmm...well, actually not the whole Wizarding World, only those in Britain and Scotland. The house-elves in the Americas, Asia, France, and Australia are quite free. It's not something that the Ministry wants the Britain Wizarding World to know as they know a few good-hearted wizards would try to free them. I'm afraid that the British Wizarding World are very...bigoted. There are a lot of Purebloods here who would hate to lose their servants," Severus told him.

Harry blinked, his expression surprised. "Huh. I wonder if Dobby knows about this. I'll have to be sure to tell him that. He may want to visit some of those countries," he mused thoughtfully. He shook his head and sighed. "It just goes to show you how small minded the British Wizarding World is. The house-elves love to serve, if they so choose. I find it abhorrent that they are forced to serve those who would abuse them for entertainment. It's disgusting," he stated with a frown.

Severus sighed. "Yes, it is, but sadly, it's something that will probably never be changed. It's been that way for hundreds of years. It's would only take something drastic to change it," he informed Harry.

Harry pursed his lips. "Mmmm...we'll see," he stated.

Severus looked at him thoughtfully before shaking his head. Whatever Harry had planned, he didn't want to know. He could only imagine the chaos that the Wizarding World's Savior would cause. He smirked internally; it just might be worth staying around to see.

Harry and Severus began to eating, the silence of the noontide only broken by the sounds of silverware clinking against plates. When the men were finally done with their lunch, Sage came back and cleared the table, although she left Ron's plate with a warming spell on it.

Severus looked at Harry very closely and said, "I didn't know that people in Azkaban spent so much time in the sun that they developed freckles and auburn streaks in their hair."

Harry looked at Severus in surprise, and then started chuckling and decided to play along with Severus's game.

"Actually, Severus, not only do we enjoy hours of refreshing and relaxing sunbathing every sunny day, but there are also several training centers, including a laundry, and a beauty school, where they train the inmates in careers for when they're released. I'm certain you've heard of that? Don't you think that they've done a nice job streaking my hair?" Harry asked with a grin.

Severus chuckled at Harry's reply and then said, "Seriously, Harry, you've never had freckles, your skin is paler than it was after eighteen months in Azkaban, although much healthier looking, and I can't see you being so vain as to color your hair first thing after you leave prison. Your eyes also have specks of brown in them and I noticed that Black's eyes have specks of green in them that hadn't been there before. In addition, Mr. Black is, well, blacker if you will pardon the pun, than he was. His hair and complexion have taken on a distinctly darker cast to them. Moreover, no one in their right minds would bother teaching job skills to inmates. What's going on?" Severus asked with curiosity.

"Simple, after Ron went through the Emancipation Rite, we both went through the Blood Brothers rite. I'm not certain what I expected with the rite, but neither of us expected that our appearances would change, or that we would have a bond through which we can share our emotions. All in all, it was a fascinating experience and was one of the best decisions I've ever made. By the way, most Muggle prisons spend a lot of time and money training and teaching their prisoners," Harry explained.

"Interesting," Severus commented, "Another thing that will upset the Headmaster."

Harry looked at him and smirked. "It's what I do best."

Harry reached over for his teacup and settled back for a moment. Then he sipped his tea and looked at Severus thoughtfully. He put his cup down and with a sigh. "So, how long have you known that Dumbledore was a manipulative son of bitch who's no better than Voldemort?" he asked casually.

Severus' head whipped up suddenly and he stared at Harry, his expression surprised. Harry stared at him calmly and Severus' expression changed to realization. "You know," he stated hoarsely.

Harry nodded and gave a heavy sigh. "I know. I've known to some extent, ever since Sirius was killed," he informed him with a sneer, ignoring the confused look Severus gave him. "That's when I realized that Dumbledore wanted to control me. I was his weapon, nothing more. Therefore, I decided to take control away from him and with Ron's help, I did that. I'm sure the Headmaster was pissed when he found out we were gone."

Severus smirked. "To say the least. I hear he destroyed several of the items in his office during his temper tantrum. He hasn't been in a particularly good mood these last couple of days, either. Something that has to do with the Rite, I presume?" Severus asked with a tiny grin.

Harry smiled then shrugged. "I'm familiar enough with the Headmaster's actions to know that he would use the Rite as leverage

against Ron. We were just lucky that we found out the goblins could do it for us."

Severus looked surprised by the comment. "So that's how he did it. The Headmaster has no clue to how it was done."

Harry looked at him, confused. "I would've thought as old as he is, he would know the law. Then again I was told that it is not a well known law."

Severus shook his head and said, "Dumbledore has little to do with the other magical creatures of this world. He has just enough contact to make himself look good and that's about it. He was very shocked by Dobby. That reminds me, your little house-elf has a bottle of Phoenix tears that belongs to me."

At that moment, Dobby appeared before them and smiled at the Potions Professor. In his hand was the bottle of Phoenix tears that he had taken from Severus. "Dobby is giving you back your vial. Dobby has no need to them," He said as he laid the vial on Severus' lap.

"Ah, thank you Dobby," Severus said and Dobby nodded.

Harry laughed and said, "He told me earlier that he needed to give them back to you. He wanted to make it look like he had gotten what he came after. I asked him why he stuck around and didn't just leave when Dumbledore came by and he told me that he needed to teach the Headmaster a lesson."

Dobby turned towards Harry and held out a bottle of potions. "Harry needs to be taking his potion. Harry didn't take it with breakfast. Dobby doesn't forget even if Harry does," the house-elf told him sternly.

Harry laughed at Dobby and said, "You take your oath of protection very seriously, Dobby."

"Oath of protection?" Severus asked.

Harry looked at him and Dobby, a question on his face. Dobby looked at Severus and gave him an intent look before turning back to Harry and nodding. Dobby then glared at him and looked the bottle pointedly. Harry sighed, opened the bottle, and drank the potion. He handed the bottle back to Dobby, who nodded with satisfaction and popped out of the room.

"Apparently, Dobby has given me permission to tell you about the protection oath. I found out that when a house-elf is free, his or her magic is actually stronger than if they are bound. They are able to use in ways that no one in the Wizarding World even knows of. By willingly giving someone an oath of protection, a house-elf's magic grows even more. I'm told that the magic of a house-elf should be stronger in order to protect those to whom they have given their oath to. I noticed that since Dobby has given Ron and me his oath, he has become stronger, prouder, and more aggressive. I've also found that the house-elves in this castle are nothing like those in the rest of the Wizarding World. Since they are all free, and have been for generations, they don't need permission to mate or to have children. They can use their magic however they want, they can go where they choose or do what they want. While they still enjoy serving the owners of this castle, they have their own minds and they are far from the submissive elves you see at Hogwarts," Harry revealed.

Severus looked intrigued. "I have to admit that I haven't really given the house-elves much thought. I had a couple when I was young, but both of them were very old and died not long after I graduated Hogwarts. I never got another one because the idea of enslavement repulses me for obvious reasons."

"Voldemort you mean?" Harry asked gently.

"That's only one of my masters," Severus answered bitterly.

Harry looked at him, confused. "What do you mean?"

"Have you ever wondered why I don't just pack up and leave Hogwarts and my position?" Severus asked. "I'm rich enough that I don't need to work. I am from a very wealthy, powerful Pureblood family. To alleviate any boredom I had, I could simply make potions

and sell them. I'm not bragging when I say that I'm one of the top Potion Masters of the day. My potions are requested by the richest people and several governments. No, the reason I stay is because of the Headmaster."

Harry looked at him warily and asked, "Are you loyal to him?"

Severus snorted, contempt shining from his eyes. "Not by choice. I thought when I turned to spy on Voldemort that I was getting a better bargain. I was shocked to find that it wasn't the case," the Potions Master informed him bitterly.

Harry looked upset and asked, "Why do you stay then? Why not just leave? I'm sure you're Slytherin enough to have made plans to disappear if things didn't work out. Why not just leave?"

Severus opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out. He growled, frustrated, and drew something out of his pocket. He put a small bundle on the table and drew out his wand. After casting finite, three enlarged books sat on the table. Severus opened one and placed it in front of Harry.

Curious, Harry began to read and eyes widen with shock then horror. He looked up at Severus and asked, "Tell me he didn't. But ... how? Shouldn't those two connections interfere with each other? Wouldn't Voldemort know that you had been marked by the Headmaster?"

Severus shook his head, unable to explain. Grabbing the other book that Severus was holding out he read it. Harry started to comment when Ron came back into the room. He sat down next to Harry on the couch and looked at them curiously.

"So, what's going on in here? Oh, goody, food," he said eagerly and grabbed his plate. Harry watched in slight disgust as Ron began gulping down his food. He waited until Ron was finished before even continuing the conversation. He knew that Ron would only be concerned with eating and nothing else.

After Ron had finally finished his lunch, Harry handed him the first book that Severus had brought and told him to read. After a few

minutes, Ron looked up, confusion on his face. "Um...why am I reading about Dark Marks? I already know that Snape has one so what the deal?"

"He has two!" Harry growled.

"Two? I didn't think you could have two. I know You Know Who," Ron paused then rolled his eyes at the look Harry gave him. "I mean Tom is crazy, but why would he be dumb enough to mark Severus twice?"

"He didn't. Dumbledore did," Harry growled angrily.

"WHAT?" Ron yelled, surprised.

"Apparently, that bastard gave Professor Snape another Dark Mark. Not only that, but he cast a secrecy spell on him as well. He can't talk about the mark nor can he tell anyone what the Headmaster has been up to," Harry informed his best friend. He looked at Ron's outraged face and swallowed a smile. Ron may not like Severus, but he hated the injustice even more.

"How do you know about the secrecy spell if he can't tell you about it?" Ron asked and Harry held up the second book that Severus had brought. Reaching for the third book, Harry began to read. After he was finished, he closed his eyes and sighed. "You've been able to get around both of these spells, haven't you? You brought the books you could leave clues about the secrecy spells. You didn't have to tell me anything, you just had me read about it, and I drew my own conclusions. You've been able to get around the loyalty spell several different times. I've seen it, hell I've heard it. Like the night we left Hogwarts and I've heard some of the comments you make about the Headmaster. Even earlier when we were talking about the Headmaster, you told me a few things that would go against the spells. So somehow you can get around it."

Severus nodded. "Fading," he forced out.

"The loyalty spell is fading?" Harry reiterated and the Potions Master nodded. "So, that's how you are able to get around it."

"Around what?" Ron asked.

"Apparently, Professor Snape also has a loyalty spell on him. It's supposed to make him totally loyal to Dumbledore. He can't say anything bad about him, or go against any of his wishes. He'll always be concerned about Dumbledore's welfare, and he will defend that old bastard with his very life. This spell was created for making slaves, Ron. Severus is nothing more than Dumbledore's slave."

Ron sat back against the couch, shocked. He knew that the Headmaster was manipulative and cared only about power and money, but to give Snape the Dark Mark was beyond what Ron could comprehend. He couldn't believe that Dumbledore could be dark enough to do that. Ron sighed as another precious belief crumbled under the burden of reality. It hurt to know that Dumbledore was no better than Voldemort. He just had more practice at hiding it.

Ron looked at Severus and asked, "What else has he threatened you with?"

Severus didn't answer, but he looked over at Harry and gave him a pointed look. Ron looked confused for a second before his eyes widened in understanding. "Azkaban. He threatened you with Azkaban," he snarled, disgusted.

Harry glared coldly. "Over my dead body," he snapped.

Ron nodded in agreement and looked thoughtful. He tapped his lip with his fingers and said slowly, "So, let me get this straight, you have two Dark Marks, one from Tom, and the other from Dumbledore. You're also bound by a secrecy spell, therefore you're unable to tell a soul anything about Dumbledore, not that anyone would believe their precious Headmaster is evil or dark. You also have a loyalty spell cast upon you making you Dumbledore's slave. On top of that, you have the threat of being sent to Azkaban hanging over your head if you step out of line. How am I doing so far?" he questioned.

Severus tried to answer, but he couldn't. He growled, frustrated once again and Ron stopped him. "Don't bother trying to answer. Your reaction is enough for me to get the message. So, if you're a prisoner,

why haven't you gotten desperate enough to kill yourself? That would be one sure way of getting out from under both of them," Ron asked, curiously.

Severus' eyes darkened and he looked away, a look of shame on his face. Ron's eyes widened in understanding and he cursed. "You tried, didn't you? You tried, but Dumbledore stopped you. He cast another spell on you, didn't he? That's why he cast the loyalty spell on you. Merlin, he's taken everything away from you," Ron said with a horrified whisper. Severus looked down in sadness and rage, unable to look at them. Harry stood up and began to pace back and forth.

"That's it! You're not leaving here. We need to find a way to get rid of the Dark Mark. Both of them! Then we need to find a way to cancel the spells. This is wrong! No one should have to go through this. You're an honorable man and this is how you're repaid. Oh no, not on my watch!"

Ron had been reading the book on the loyalty spell when he looked at Harry. "Actually, I think we should take the loyalty spell off first then the secrecy spell. According to the loyalty spell, Severus would be forced to tell Dumbledore that he's seen us and that you're fine. That can't be allowed. I assume that Dumbledore's Dark Mark is hidden with a glamour of some sort. We need to know its location before we can get rid of it and only Severus knows where it's at. So, we need to make sure to take off the secrecy spell."

"So, how do we get the spells off?" Harry asked Ron and the redhead shrugged and sighed with resignation. "Its times like these when, I wish we were still friends with Hermione. I hate to say it, but we need to do," Ron paused to grimace with distaste, "research."

Harry cracked a grin at Ron and was about to reply when a feminine voice behind him said, "Why don't you just cancel it with the finite spell."

Harry whirled around and saw Rose standing in the corner of the room. "I figured it wouldn't work with the spell. Isn't it a powerful dark spell?"

Rose nodded, her eyes on the book that Ron was holding. "Yes, it is, but that's the beauty of using both of those spells. The inventors decided that since the spell was so powerful people would think that they would need to use a powerful cancellation spell. In a rather brilliant move, they decided to make it simple so they keyed the spells to end with a simple finite spell. Those two spells are rarely used because of the small chance that they will not work right."

"There have been a few cases where the spells didn't work properly -- usually to the spell-caster's regret. If not cast properly, the spell will begin to fade and the victims will find a way around the spell. It doesn't always create a loyal slave. It seems that it doesn't work correctly on your friend. He shouldn't be able to get around it at all, but as you said before he has moments where he is not loyal to your Headmaster. Either your Headmaster didn't read the fine print on the spell, or he thought that no one would ever find out about the spells. Rather arrogant of him if that is the case," Rose said with a sniff of disapproval.

"That's quite devious," Harry said and looked over to Severus. The man looked relieved and hopeful. "Would you like me to try to take off the spell for you?" Harry asked.

"I didn't think you could. You don't have a wand. It was snapped before you went into Azkaban," Severus said, confused.

Harry smiled and Ron smirked. Harry pulled out his wand and showed it to Severus, whose eyes widened with surprise. "Ron tricked the Ministry by transfiguring a trick wand that belong to the twins and exchanged my wand with the false one. The wand the Ministry snapped wasn't mine. Ron took my wand and hid it, thinking that I would need it later. I was very lucky that he did that."

Severus looked over at Ron and smirked. "That was positively Slytherin of you, Mr. Black."

Ron grinned back at him. "Thank you. I thought so," he said calmly and Harry had to hold back his laughter at the look Severus gave Ron. He must've assumed Ron would be offended when he was called a

Slytherin, but Ron was getting more comfortable with his Slytherin qualities. It wasn't the insult it used to be.

"So, do you want me to take off the spell?" Harry asked.

Severus paused, and then nodded. He sat up straight in his chair and waited for Harry to cast the spell.

Harry lifted his wand and pointed it at Severus. "Finite," he said and watched as Severus slumped into his chair. He rushed over to Severus and checked on him. He watched, concerned as the man's eye fluttered and he looked around. "Did it work?" Harry asked anxiously. Severus opened his mouth to say something and growled, as he couldn't say a word. It hadn't worked.

Harry looked back at Rose. "I guess you were wrong on this one, Rose. Thanks for trying though. It looks like Dumbledore is a little more devious than we thought."

Rose frowned at Harry. "I wasn't wrong about the cancellation spell, but there must be something blocking it. Did the Headmaster give you any jewelry, or any other item that you would be keeping on your person at all times?" Rose asked Severus. He shook his head and Rose growled in frustration. "The spells must be keyed somewhere. That would be the only way to counteract the cancellation spell. You would have to cast the finite spell at the item it has been keyed to."

"The Dark Mark," Ron said suddenly. Harry, Rose, and Severus looked at him in surprise. Ron looked a little uncomfortable at suddenly being the center of attention, but shrugged it off. "Think about it. It's the only thing Dumbledore gave you that you carry everywhere. He keyed the two spells onto the Dark Mark. Crap!" he said suddenly.

"What?" Harry asked.

"Dumbledore hid the Dark Mark under a glamour and Snape can't tell us where it is, so we can't find it. If we can't find it then we can't cancel the two spells. It's a rather vicious circle," Ron said with some awe. "Rather brilliant and devious if you think about it."

Severus looked disappointed and Rose grumbled in discontent. "Too bad you can't see past the glamour spell. I'm sure the spell he used for that is not going to be easy to get rid of."

Ron looked at Harry sharply and Harry began to grin. "My magical aura thingy?" he asked and Ron grinned.

"May I ask what you two are muttering about?" Severus inquired with a glare. Disappointment did not react well with the man.

Harry smiled at him. "Did you know that I can see magical auras?" he asked innocently. "Yep, sure can. I can see magical creatures, I've seen through a Metamorphmagus, why I'm sure that I'm going to be able to see magical items next. But I'm positive you don't want to know about all that," Harry said with mock sadness.

Severus looked excited and asked, "You can see magical auras?"

Harry looked at Ron, mock confusion on his face. "Isn't that what I said?" Harry asked. Ron snickered and Severus gave him a ferocious glare.

Harry gave a large sigh and replied, "Yes, I can see magical auras. I'm sure with a little coaching, I'll be able to see your Dark Mark. If I know where it's at then I can cancel the spells."

"That's great, but then what happens afterwards? He'll still have the Dark Mark and unless you know a way of getting rid of that Dumbledore can still get to him, just like You Kn...Tom can," Ron said.

"I may have a suggestion for that," Rose said. They looked at her with curiosity. "Several hundred years ago, a Potter had a friend with a Dark Mark that was given to him by force from a Dark wizard. In an attempt to help his friend overcome the pain of the mark, Potter constructed a ring that blocked the connection between the dark wizard and his friend. It worked, very well in fact. They started to research the Dark Mark and ways to get rid of it, but before they found anything useful, the dark wizard ambushed Potter's friend and

killed him. Potter kept the ring and his research and put it in the family vault. It should still be there."

"Sounds good, but why are you so hesitant to tell me about it? What's the catch?" Harry asked.

"The ring can only be activated by a drop of Potter blood," she said.

"I can do that."

"And the ability to speak Parselmouth," Rose replied.

Harry stared at her, his expression shocked. "That Potter was Parselmouth?" he asked.

"Yes, he was."

"But I got my Parselmouth ability from Voldemort," Harry stammered.

Rose frowned at him. "I don't know who told you that, but there have always been Parselmouths in the Potter line. True, it's rare and often skips generations, but I know at least twenty Parselmouths that have been in the Potter line since I died."

Harry gaped at her. Severus got up and walked behind Harry, putting a comforting hand on Harry's shoulder. "Remember who told you this, Mr. Potter. Take anything he says with some skepticism."

Harry turned and looked at him then nodded in understanding. He frowned heavily. "It's just another thing that he either kept from me or twisted for his own use. Seriously, what was the man thinking? That I would never visit my vault or check out my family history? I may not have been old enough then, but he had to know that once I was old enough I would want to know more about my family. I would be able to research and travel to find out more," he said.

"I doubt Dumbledore thought you were anything more than a little kid under his control," Ron stated. "You may have had doubts about him, but who would you have gone to for help? My former parents? Lupin? No, because they're too close to Dumbledore to see what he's really

like. Severus? You couldn't go to him for two reasons, one he was a spy for Dumbledore, and two he hated you. The one person you could have gone to was killed," Ron said with a sneer, "when you got to close to him. He was a problem so he had to die."

Severus looked at them in confusion. That was the second time that he had heard Black's death mentioned with the same amount of anger and disdain. He had thought that Potter loved his godfather, but the way both of the young men mentioned Black's death, he was beginning to wonder. Severus thought about it for a moment then shook his head, no there has to be something more to it. He would find out when he had the chance.

Harry frowned at Ron and said, "Regardless of what the Headmaster lied about, I can still activate the ring for Severus. That'll take care of the connections until we can find a way to get rid of the Dark Mark or kill Voldemort and Dumbledore, whichever comes first."

"Well, then, what are we waiting for?" Ron asked. "Get rid of the spells then let's go get the ring."

Harry nodded and looked at Severus. "You know this is going to piss Dumbledore off, don't you? You won't be able to leave the castle for a long while. Is there anything you want to do first?"

Severus frowned then nodded. "Take off the spells first," he forced out. Harry could see him struggle to get around the secrecy spell. "Then I will take care of things on my end. I can't leave here with the loyalty spell intact. I want to make sure I have some things taken care of before I cut the connection. Once that's done, there is no going back."

"Very well. Take a seat and get comfortable." Harry watched as Severus sat down. With a sigh, Harry grabbed a small stool and sat next to Severus' chair. He took a couple of breaths and then stared at Severus intently. He gazed at him for several minutes then blew out a breath in frustration. "It's not working. I can't see any magic. Maybe it won't work for this."

"No, Harry, you're slowly developing it. You can see the auras of magical creatures, you can see past the Metamorphmagus form, you'll be able to see magical signatures. You just need to clear your mind and relax. Let the magic come to you, don't try to force it. It won't work that way. Now, take in a couple of deep breaths and let it out," Ron said softly.

Harry obeyed, breathing in through his nose and out his mouth. He did this several times before he could feel his body unclenching. He did a couple of more times and his body was finally relaxed.

"How is it you know what to do, Mr. Black?" Harry heard Severus ask.

"Bill has the same gift. He was older than Harry, around twenty-two or so when he developed the gift. He had to train to develop his gifts fully. He used these techniques that he learned to help me when I was having trouble accessing my power after my magical inheritance. For some reason, it was hard to use my magic, something about a block. As you know, it's common after a magical inheritance since the body can go into shock with the increase in power. Bill sat me down and had me go through the technique that enabled him to access his gift. Once I learned it, I only had to use it a couple of times before the block was gone and I could finally access my full potential," Ron explained.

"Ah," Severus commented.

"Good, now close your eyes and find your magical core," Ron said to Harry. He closed his eyes and looked inside himself. He found his magical core, a large bright ball of glowing energy, centered in his abdomen. He felt a warm glow fill his body and Harry sighed in contentment. He could hear Ron talking to him in the distance.

"I want you to touch the core and let the magic crawl up your body until it reaches your eyes. Don't force it, just let it come on its own."

He gave small nod and touched his magical core. He felt a flare of power and watched in awe as he saw the magic crawl up his stomach, then his chest. He could feel the warmth creeping up his neck, and then his head. His eyes began to itch and he slowly opened his eyes.

He looked at Severus in awe. He could see Severus was surrounded by a light green color, with a mixture of red and gold enhancing the green. He glanced over him carefully and saw black magical aura on his left forearm. There was a disgusting feeling the black spot gave off and Harry realized it was Voldemort's Dark Mark. Harry now knew what he was looking for and began to look for Dumbledore's mark. He couldn't find it anywhere. Harry frowned at him and said, "You need to turn around. I can't find anything on your front except for Voldemort's Dark Mark.s"

Severus nodded, stood up, and turned around. Harry looked over him carefully and found the mark. It was a large dark spot with some orange and a sickly yellow mixed in. Dumbledore had marked Severus on his lower back, a place that would always be hidden. Harry took out his wand and pointed at the black spot. With a muttered, "Finite," he watched as a beam of gold hit the dark spot. Harry watched the spells on the mark disappear in a bright burst of color and he could no longer see either the orange or the yellow.

"They're gone. The finite spell got rid of them just a Rose said it would," Harry said.

Severus turned around and looked at Harry. "Are you sure?" he asked sternly.

"Yes. Before I cast the spell, I could see the magical auras of the spells, but once I cast the finite spell, they disappeared in a burst of light. They're gone and nothing remains but the black aura of the Dark Mark. If you don't believe me, why don't you say something kind and wonderful about our beloved Headmaster," Harry said with a smirk.

Severus gave him a sharp look. "Our beloved Headmaster is a manipulative, egotistical, homicidal maniac who makes Voldemort look good. Not only that, but he's forced me into servitude by marking me with a Dark Mark on my lower back," he said with triumph. Severus stood there looking proud, then suddenly deflated, collapsing in the chair.

Harry jumped up in concern and rushed over to him. "Severus, are you all right?" he asked.

Severus looked up at Harry with pain-filled eyes. "I'm finally free of those spells. For the first time in almost twenty years, I can truly say what I want. I'm no longer forced to lie. It's hard to contemplate."

"It'll be better once I get the ring. In fact, I think that Ron and I should go see our good friend Susie at Gringotts. He must be missing us by now," Harry said with a grin directed towards Ron.

Severus looked at him, confused, while Ron started to laugh. Harry grinned at Severus. "I'll explain it to you sometime. Now, if you want, you can put your affairs in order. I'll ask Dobby to accompany you, he can help you pack and bring you back here. He's quite adept at detecting tails and tracking spells. I'm positive that as soon as the connection to Dumbledore is closed, he'll realize that you've neutralized the Dark Mark and he'll find a way to retaliate. Voldemort will, of course, be just as happy with you. You won't be safe. It's one thing to have one powerful wizard after you but to have two, well that's going to be a mite difficult. Are you sure you want to do this?" Harry asked with concern.

Harry could see Severus thinking about it carefully before making up his mind. "I would rather die free than to be bound in servitude any longer. It may not be a very Slytherin outlook, but right now, I don't care. I want my mind to be my own again."

"All right, then Ron and I will visit Gringotts, and you do whatever you need to do. Dobby," Harry called out.

Dobby appeared before Harry. "Yes, Harry, how can Dobby help you?"

"I need you to go with Severus and help him however you can. I want you to watch out for Dumbledore. Severus is under our protection now. I want you to watch out for anybody that follows him or for any tracking spells that may be placed on him. Once he is done, bring him back here."

"Dobby will protect Severus," he said firmly. "Headmaster will not get him. Dobby will teach him another lesson if he tries," Dobby said with a menacing growl.

Harry, Ron, and Severus grinned at that image. "Very well. Ron and I are off to Gringotts. We'll see you two later."

Harry and Ron waved at Severus and Dobby as they left the room. Severus looked at the unusual house-elf. "I guess we should be off. I need to go to Hogwarts, then Gringotts and my manor. Maybe if we're lucky, we can get in some Dumbledore torture while we're at Hogwarts. I have few potions that can be used," Severus said with a sly look.

Dobby looked at him and gave him a feral smile. "Dobby is okay with that."

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I would like to thank Fangella Marie for letting me use the name Eppy for my vibrating brooms. I use it to honor the great Eppy, the dominatrix house-elf that resides in her story, Harry Potter and the Azkaban Parody. It's a wonderful parody of all the Azkaban stories out there. If you haven't read it, then you need to do so. You can find it on Fanfiction(dot)net.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The manor was dark and depressing. The aura of evil surrounded it, making anyone who came near it, tremble with fear. If one could hear past the wards and spells, they would be horrified to hear screams of tortured souls. However, those inside the manor found the screams to be music to their ears and laughed joyously when the screams got louder.

In a room lay, a man who was bleeding profusely and barely conscious. He was tortured beyond imagination and his only crime was that he was a Muggle, a person without magic, a person who had no knowledge of the Wizarding World. He only knew that his family had been tortured and then murdered. He watched, horrified, as his precious son was forced to kill his daughter and then turned the knife on himself. He watched in anguish as the men in black robes and white masks raped and mutilated his wife, laughing at his pleading and begging. They finally tired of her and killed her. His mind broke and he retreated, never knowing the torture that was inflicted upon him. He died in a flash of green light, a broken man whose only crime was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Voldemort watched as his Death Eaters tortured the Muggle family. He chuckled as Avery smacked Goyle for getting blood on his robe when he cut the man too hard. The Dark Lord watched with indulgence while his Death Eaters played. With a sigh of satisfaction at how things had been going, he leaned back on his throne of human bones. His mind began to wander and he laughed with malice as he wondered how Harry Potter was faring in Azkaban. He laughed as he remembered how fast the Wizarding World had turned on him. His plan had been foolproof. He worked hard on opening the connection between the two of them, and it paid off at Potter's trial. Even though he only had control for a short time, it was enough to get the boy convicted. He sighed as he remembered the celebrations of the Death Eaters when Harry Potter was sentenced to Azkaban. He thought fondly on the night of torture and mayhem that had ensued.

Voldemort shifted in his throne, idly wondering how the old man was taking things. His weapon was defeated and the Wizarding World was losing faith in him. His little Order hadn't been much help in

containing all the massacres caused by Voldemort and his Death Eaters. With Potter and his visions out of the way and his misinformation to Snape, Voldemort was gaining a larger grasp on the Wizarding World. Voldemort sneered at the thought of Snape. Dumbledore was secure in the knowledge that Voldemort didn't know about Snape and his traitorous ways, but he knew, oh yes, he knew.

He thought about killing the man, but decided that he would use him instead. He began to give Snape misinformation to keep the Order off balance. However, he knew that Dumbledore was catching on, so he decided that he needed to kill the spy soon. He looked over at Snape, who was standing in the corner and staring at everyone with a cold expression and snarled in disgust. The sooner he got rid of him the better, but he had one more little mission for Snape. He needed a potion made and when it was finished, Snape would become a new source of the Death Eater's entertainment. His minions hated nothing more than a traitor.

Wormtail startled Voldemort out of his thoughts. He came scurrying into the room, a look of panic on his face. He fell to the ground and kissed the hem of Voldemort's robe. He looked terrified. "M...m...master," he stuttered.

Voldemort looked down at the quivering, pathetic man and curled his lip up with disgust. "What is it Wormtail, that you have to interrupt me?" he hissed.

"T...t...t...the Malfoys were captured and taken to the Ministry. Dumbledore was at the Minister's office. T...t...t...there is talk about releasing Potter from Azkaban," he stammered softly and cringed, waiting for Voldemort's reaction.

It was not long in coming. "WHAT? How dare they get captured and ruin my plans," he yelled furiously.

The Death Eaters stopped their torture, killed their victim, and walked over to Voldemort. Bellatrix stepped forward and knelt at his feet. "My Lord, is something wrong?" she asked.

"The Malfoys were captured and one of my plans was foiled," Voldemort replied furiously.

"Stupid Malfoys. I always knew they were going to get captured," Avery muttered softly to Goyle and they both chuckled maliciously.

Voldemort snarled, took out his wand, and yelled, "Crucio." The spell hit Avery and the man fell to the floor, screaming in pain. Goyle's face went white and he took a step back from the convulsing man.

Voldemort growled angrily. "Do you think it's funny that my plans got ruined?" he hissed. He lifted the curse and Avery lay there, sobbing in pain. "Get up, you worm. So you find the capture of my Death Eaters amusing, do you? Goyle, Bellatrix, take Avery down to the Dungeon and show him the error of his ways."

The two Death Eaters grabbed the whimpering man and dragged him out of the room. Voldemort turned his gaze towards the other Death Eaters and they shivered under his cold glare. "I want you to find out what happened, and then I want you to kill the Malfoys. I no longer have any need for them."

"But Master," one of the Death Eaters began and Voldemort's rage boiled over. He pointed his wand at the Death Eater and screamed, "Crucio." He watched with malicious delight as the man fell to the floor and began to convulse. Voldemort frowned; he didn't feel any better. The rage was still boiling inside of him and he didn't feel any satisfaction from the torture. He lifted the curse and looked at the quivering man thoughtfully. He smirked. "Concoqu," Voldemort hissed and watched, fascinated, as the man began to cook from the inside out. He relished the screams and embraced them, smiling as they began to calm him down. The man finally died and Voldemort sighed wistfully, nothing like a spot of torture to get you through the day.

He glanced at his nervous Death Eaters and chuckled. He watched them cringe in terror and reveled in their fear. This is why he became a Dark Lord. To watch others cringe before him in fear. Everyone feared him, everyone except Dumbledore and Potter. His mood became foul again and he snarled. "Leave me!" he growled. The Death Eaters bowed then left the room. "Wormtail! You stay."

The quivering man bowed to the Dark Lord and waited for whatever his Lord would do. He whimpered internally, it was times like this that he wondered why he ever joined the Dark Lord. There was no sign of the power the Dark Lord had promised. No, he was nothing more than a punching bag for the Dark Lord and his followers. He should've stayed with the Aurors when they captured him, but he'd had a chance to escape, so he took it. He'd transformed into his animagus form after one of the Aurors forgot to cast the binding spell and left in a hurry. He had come back to Voldemort, triumphant, only to be tortured for being captured and giving out information.

"You shall go to Hogwarts and spy on the Order. I want to know what's going on. Dumbledore will know where Potter is. Once you find out, let me know and I will crush him before he can even begin to heal. His body will be weak and his mind shattered, he will be ripe for the picking. Go!"

Voldemort watched, disgusted, as the rat ran out of the room. He shook his head, what was I thinking when I allowed that idiot join me? Oh yes, I wanted the Potters dead. Mmm...His presence is getting old. I may have to take care of him as well. Better yet, I know a certain werewolf who would enjoy a treat. Voldemort began to laugh evilly, his red eyes glowing with malicious humor.

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Several days later, Wormtail came to the manor and scurried into the room where Voldemort sat. He stopped in front of the chair and fell to his knees, waiting for the Dark Lord's acknowledgement. After waiting for several minutes, Voldemort finally rested his gaze upon Wormtail.

"What news do you have for me?" he hissed.

"Potter is no longer in the castle, my lord. He has disappeared, along with Weasley and Malfoy's old house-elf. No one in the Order can find them and Dumbledore is quite angry," Wormtail reported.

Voldemort was torn between anger at the news of Potter's disappearance and amusement at Dumbledore's anger. Voldemort

leaned back in his chair, idly tapping his fingers on the arm of his chair. Over the last several days, Voldemort had tossed around an idea of asking Potter to join him instead of killing him. If his mind wasn't shattered from his stay in Azkaban, then he would be furious with the betrayal of his friends and the Wizarding World. The idea has some appeal.

"How was Potter's condition?"

"He's catatonic. Apparently, there was a conflict between Dumbledore and the now youngest Weasley. When Potter was younger, he had some papers drawn up that would give Ron Weasley control of Potter's estate if something were to happen to him and he became unable to make his own decisions. He then tricked Dumbledore into signing a Wizarding Contract that would disallow any interference with said paperwork. If he does, Dumbledore loses his magic," Wormtail explained with a small smile.

Voldemort looked at Wormtail, shocked, then began to grin. He erupted into laughter. "Dumbledore lost control over his weapon, and he never even knew it. I have to admire Potter's foresight," he said, amused.

Wormtail gave the Dark Lord a nervous grin. "The youngest Weasley has also stated that he is interested in proceeding with the Rite of Emancipation. There has been conflict within the family and they have not treated him very well."

Voldemort sneered and said, "Yes, those Weasleys are hypocritical morons. They give the Wizarding World a bad name."

If Wormtail hadn't feared for his very life, he would've rolled his eyes at that comment, but luckily, his preservation for life overcame that urge.

Voldemort looked thoughtful. "I decided that I was going to ask Potter to join me if his condition would allow it, but since the brat is catatonic, he shall just have to die instead," he stated suddenly. "I want you, Bellatrix and Avery, to find Potter and bring him to me. You are not to kill him, no matter the temptation. I will be the one to kill the brat. I will

make him ever regret defying me. Go now and get Bellatrix. Find him Wormtail, because if you don't I shall make your life a living hell," Voldemort hissed.

With a brief bow to Voldemort, Wormtail turned and ran out of the room. He had no idea where to start. Not even Dumbledore knew where to find Potter and he had been looking. Wormtail remembered watching the tantrum Dumbledore threw when he found Potter missing. He'd seen a great many things over the last several days that shocked him. He came to realize that Dumbledore was not the kind man he appeared to be. Why he hadn't told the Dark Lord the things he saw he didn't know, but a thought terrified him, just how bad could Dumbledore be? Could he be as bad as the Dark Lord? If so, would the Wizarding World even survive?

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Ron and Harry walked into Gringotts, swaggering arrogantly. Harry snickered quietly as Ron looked around and walked up to a goblin. Ron looked down at the goblin arrogantly. "I would like to talk to Susie, please," he demanded coldly.

The goblin looked up at him and sneered. "There is no one here by the name of Susie."

Ron arched an eyebrow and glared at the goblin. "Are you telling me that you have no one here by the name of Susie? Are you lying to me, little man?"

The goblin gasped, his face outraged. "Little man? How dare you!"

Ron straightened to his 6'3" height and glared at the goblin. "I dare, little man, because I know you're lying to me about Susie. Yesterday a friend of mine told me about a goblin, named Susie, who worked here. He told me that the goblin had name issues and that my friend was kind enough to name him. He then told me that the goblin lied about not having a name, therefore hurting my friend's feelings. I am here to demand satisfaction. I would like to speak to Susie, now, or I swear to Merlin I shall cause a scene of untold proportions," Ron informed him while glaring at the angry goblin.

The goblin growled, his expression furious. "I have told you already, wizard, we do not have a goblin working here by the name of Susie," he stated furiously.

"LIAR!" Ron roared. "Is this how you run your business? Do you often lie over such a simple thing as a name? What else have you goblins been lying about? The safety of the bank, or the amount of money in our vaults? Why I even heard there are actually two speeds on your carts, but you tell the Wizarding World that there is only one," Ron paused, and then gasped dramatically. "Are you really even goblins? Are you lying about that?" Ron wailed loudly.

The goblin looked around frantically, noticing that the other people in the bank were watching and listening to them. Realizing that it would not be good for business if the wizard continued on, he hurriedly told him that he would find Susie. Ron glared at the goblin suspiciously. Finally, with an indignant sniff, he nodded. "Very well, but you had better not be lying about that." With a nod, the goblin rushed off, looking over his shoulder at Ron with a look of fear.

Ron could hear Harry chuckling behind him. He looked over at his friend and in a low voice said, "Blimey, Harry, now I know why you do all those stupid things when you're bored. This is fun. It's a good idea, changing our glammers. Now Susie won't know what hit him." Harry laughed softly and agreed.

Ron noticed two goblins approaching him. The second goblin stepped forward. "I am Glix. Is there something you needed?"

Ron looked him up and down. "I'm not looking for a Glix; I'm looking for Susie."

Ron watched in fascination as the nose on the goblin's face twitched. "Sir, I'm afraid there is no Susie working for us."

"You lie. My friend was here yesterday and he told me that a Susie insulted him. Now, are you Susie?" Ron asked.

"Sir..."

Ron raised finger and said, "Eh...no, unless you're Susie you can't speak. Now, are you Susie?"

"Sir as I have said before..."

"Are you Susie?" Ron asked slowly.

"Sir,"

"Are you?"

"Sir, if you..."

"Are you?"

"Sir, please,"

"Are you Susie?"

This continued the conversation for several moments before the goblin broke and yelled, "YES, FOR MERLIN'S SAKE YES, I'M SUSIE. THERE ARE YOU HAPPY?"

Ron looked down at the heavily breathing goblin curiously. "You know they have potions for your breathing problem, maybe you should get that looked at, Susie."

Glixx froze, looked up at Ron, and then threw his hands in the air. "I QUIT! I can't take the stress! I can no longer work with these crazy wizards. You're all nuts! NUTS, I TELL YOU!" Glixx screamed, ignoring the two goblin guards that walked up beside him. "You make a good goblin go mad. I don't even like wizards," he yelled as the guards hauled him away. The bank became quiet while everyone watched the spectacle. Whispers started when the guards drug the goblin into another room and closed the doors.

Ron looked over at Harry. "Do you think I went a little far?" he asked, concerned. Harry and Ron stared at each other then shook their heads. "Naaaaahhhh," they said together and began to laugh.

A goblin walked up to them and looked at them with amusement on his face. "Gentlemen, may I be of some assistance?"

Harry looked over at the goblin and grinned. "Biletooth, my friend. We're here to see my vault."

"Very well. Before you leave, Ghispok would like to see you. He has some paperwork for you. I believe he was to give them to your house-elf."

Harry nodded in understanding. "All right."

"If you would follow me," Biletooth said then turned and walked away. Harry and Ron followed him down to the stairways and to the cart. They got in and Harry grinned at Ron wickedly. Ron gulped and pleaded with Harry. "Please, Harry, I just ate."

"You ate a couple of hours ago, but because you're my brother," Harry paused and grinned foolishly, "I won't ask Biletooth to increase the speed of the cart."

"Thanks Harry," Ron said, relieved.

Harry nodded and turned to Biletooth. "So, how'd you know it was us? Can you see through glamours?"

Biletooth shook his head. "No, only the offices have spells to see through glamours. We normally have a Witch watching the foyer, but she is off today. The only reason I knew it was you was because you requested Susie. You are the only two wizards who would request a goblin by the name of Susie."

Harry chuckled and said, "Yeah, I guess we are. I think we broke Susie though. I was surprised he quit. I thought money was the way of life for goblins."

Biletooth smirked. "Glxxx is pretentious, even for a goblin. He dislikes wizards and can barely tolerate them enough to interact with them. He is very prejudicial. He isn't tolerated much by other goblins, who

routinely work well with wizards. In fact, most of the goblins at Gringotts don't like him. His father is the one who got him the job here."

Ron snorted. "Sounds like the Malfoys of the goblin race."

Harry grimaced at the name. He would never forget that with the help of Voldemort, Lucius and Draco killed three people that he cared for, and then framed him for their murders. The cart came to a stop and they got out. Harry opened the door to his vault, bemoaning about the fact that he would have to bleed for his money. The vaults to the door opened and Harry and Ron walked in.

Ron stopped and looked at Harry. "I just had a thought,"

"Did it hurt?" Harry asked with mock concern.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Yes, very funny, ha ha. Seriously, how are we going to find the ring in this huge vault?"

Harry looked around the vault then looked at Ron. "Good question. It's not like we can ask 'where is the ring to block Dark Marks?' and poof a light will show us where it's at."

A bright light flash towards the back of the vault and Harry looked over at Ron, his expression shocked. "No way," he breathed.

"I guess we should go find out," Ron said.

Ron and Harry walked towards the back of the vault where the light was shining. As they passed furniture, portraits, and trunks, Harry decided he would come back later and go through them. They found the light and sure enough, it was shining a small metal jewelry box. They approached the box and looked into it. There were several pieces of jewelry, some necklaces, bracelets, and earrings; there was, however, only one ring. Harry picked it up and looked it over. It was gold and silver set with an oval black onyx. Sitting in the middle of the stone was a small snake made of gold. Harry could hear a slight hissing sound coming from the snake. It was very masculine and Harry knew that Severus would probably like the ring.

"I'm pretty sure this is it," Harry said.

"How can you be sure?" Ron asked.

"Well, one, the light was shining on it. Two, it's the only ring sitting in the box. Three, there's a gold snake sitting in the middle of the ring and four, I can hear the snake talking faintly," Harry explained.

"Ah, that would do it then."

They stepped away from the pedestal and walked back towards the vault doors. As Harry passed a table, he saw a slight glow coming from a book. Curious, Harry walked over to the table and picked up the book.

"Whatcha got there, Harry?" Ron asked.

Harry shrugged as he gazed at the book. "I'm not sure. The book started to glow as we passed the table. Funny it didn't glow as we were going to the back of the vault." He opened the book and realized it was a research journal.

Skimming through it, Harry got excited as he realized the journal contained the research on Dark Marks by the man who made the ring Harry was holding. Harry felt giddy; this was something they should read through. Rose said that the man was close to finding out how to get rid of the Dark Mark. He reached the last page of the journal and found a potion recipe. Skimming through the description of the potion, Harry realized that this was a Dark Mark removal potion.

"Ron, I know how to get rid of the Dark Mark," he said with excitement.

"What do you mean?" Ron asked.

"This book is the journal of Tiberus James Potter, the man who made the ring. This is all the research he did on the Dark Mark. At the very end of the journal, he developed a potion for removing Dark Marks.

With this potion, we can rid Severus of Dumbledore and Voldemort's Dark Marks."

"Blimey, Harry, that's great," Ron replied excitedly.

Harry continued to read the potion when he came upon a problem. "Crap. We may be a little hasty in our celebration. Apparently, the potion is missing a key ingredient, but Tiberus wasn't sure which one would work," Harry explained, feeling disappointed. He closed the journal and put it in his pocket.

"Well, give it to Snape to read. Merlin knows he's a rather decent Potions Master. Maybe he can find out what's missing," Ron told him.

Harry looked at Ron, amused. "Why Ron, are you complementing Snape?"

Ron shrugged and grinned. "The last nineteen months have shown me that things are not always as they appear. I've learned that those who I thought were friends turned on us and those who I thought were enemies are actually our friends. I've decided to take a different approach to things. I've decided to adopt the wait and see approach."

"Ron, that's rather mature of you. Who are you and what've you done with my brother?" Harry teased.

"Yes, very funny," Ron said.

They snickered and walked towards the door of the vault where Biletooth was waiting. After Harry closed the vault doors, they walked to the cart and waited as Biletooth locked the outer vault doors.

Ron looked at Harry. "Wonder how and Snape and Dobby are getting along."

"I can only imagine," Harry replied.

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Concoquo – Latin – to cook, to boil

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Severus and Dobby went to Snape Manor so that Severus could settle the house before he went into hiding with Harry and Ron. As Severus began to pack up his valuable items and his rare Potions journals from his room, he thought about how he could make the wards around the house totally secure. Unfortunately, there was always a chance that Dumbledore would get past them. He wouldn't put it past the man to try to destroy his home once he realized that Snape was no longer under his control. Dumbledore's retaliation would be vicious.

He continued to pack and looked up when Dobby walked into the room.

"Professor, sirs, is there anything you need for Dobby to do?" he asked.

"I don't suppose you can put a dust free spell on the furniture? Better yet, maybe you can find a way to ward the house from Dumbledore," Severus inquired sarcastically.

Dobby gave him a toothy grin. "Dobby can spell the furniture, and Dobby can ward the house. Dumbledore cannot get past elf magic. Dobby is strong and powerful. Dobby is the reason why Wizards bind their house-elves. Dobby is getting stronger than Dumbledore," the house-elf told the Potions Master smugly.

Severus looked at him, shocked. "Really? Free house-elves are that strong?"

Dobby shook his head. "Free house-elves are powerful, but not stronger than Dumbledore. Like Wizards, each house-elf differs. Our magic is just different -- Wizards cannot get around it. Dobby gave Harry Potter and Wheezy oath of protection. Dobby has bond with Harry Potter and Wheezy."

"Bond? How is that different than the one the Wizards force on the house-elves?" Severus asked.

"It's a willing bond. Dobby voluntarily bonded with Harry Potter and Wheezy. Dobby's magic has intermixed with theirs. Harry Potter and Wheezy are strong so they make Dobby's magic stronger."

"So, if a house-elf were to willingly bond with a Wizard, their magic would get stronger, and the strength would depend on the Wizard themselves," Snape reiterated.

Dobby nodded and replied, "Yes, but Dobby bonded to two Wizards, so Dobby is very strong. Dobby needs to be strong to protect Harry Potter and Wheezy from Dumbly and Voldymort."

Severus snorted at the name Dobby had given the Dark Lord. He snickered at the thought of calling him that to his face. He could only imagine the look on Voldemort's face.

"You do realize that this makes you a very unusual elf, don't you?" Severus asked.

"Yes, but Dobby is bonded to two unusual Wizards."

Severus looked at Dobby thoughtfully when he heard that comment. He didn't understand what that meant, but he would learn later. Right now, he had a house to settle. "Very well, if you would be so kind as to spell the furniture, I will finish my packing. I'll let you know when I need the house warded."

Dobby nodded then paused before asking, "Why does the Professor not ward the house?"

"I would, but I'm afraid that the house might be watched. If I do a powerful spell then Dumbledore would know something is wrong. Will the Headmaster know that you've warded the house?" Severus asked, concerned.

Dobby shook his head. "House-elf magic is different than Wizard magic. House-elves not need sticks to do magic. It feels different so Wizards are not able to sense it."

Severus looked intrigued by that idea. "Really? Dobby, we shall have to discuss this more later. I hadn't really thought much about your magic. I wonder if it can be used in the war that is sure to come," he mused absently, his mind already on the problem.

"Dobby would be honored to fight in the war against Voldymort. There are many free elves that would fight, but no Wizard asks them. They think we are nothing, mere slaves," Dobby stated sadly. "House-elves were once a proud race, but the Wizards have enslaved us, making us small and insignificant."

Severus looked at the sad elf and realized that this elf was something he'd never seen before. He vaguely remembered him before he took off with Harry and Black. He'd been a weak, quivering, and scared elf. His vocabulary was that of a child and he was entirely too meek. Now though, he noticed the proud stance, the confident gaze. He realized that his vocabulary was growing, he was sounding more educated. "How does the bond affect you besides the magic?"

Dobby smiled brightly. "Dobby is growing. Dobby is able to learn, to grow as an elf. The bond with Harry Potter and Wheezy has freed me from my fear. Dobby is growing confident, aggressive, and proud. Dobby learns from the other free house-elves to read, to talk good, and to stand tall. Dobby is learning to become a warrior elf for his Harry Potter and Wheezy," he replied proudly.

"Warrior elf?" Severus asked, confused.

Dobby looked at him solemnly. "Dobby cannot tell about that. It is very secret order. Just know that Dobby learns to take care of Harry Potter and Wheezy, and now you, Professor. There are many things Wizards do not know about house-elves, many they will learn in time," he said with a growl.

"Do we need to fear the house-elves?" Severus asked mildly.

Dobby shook his head. "No, Professor, the bonded elves can't go against their Wizards."

Severus looked at Dobby for a moment then smiled slyly, "But they can go around them, can't they?"

Dobby looked at him then gave him a feral grin. "Dobby not knows what Professor is talking about. House-elves are meek and mild, nothing but slaves," the house-elf said with an innocent smile.

The Potions Master chuckled. He was really beginning to like Dobby. If he had been a Wizard, Severus was sure that the house-elf would have been a Slytherin. "Keep your secrets then. Help me get this house ready. Afterwards, I need to go to Gringotts. I will leave Hogwarts for later. I want to be sure to leave the Headmaster a present, thanking him for his care," the Potions Master said with a malicious sneer. Dobby gave him a grin in return and disappeared. Severus returned to his packing, making sure to grab everything of value.

He went over to the wall and pressed a hidden button. A panel slid away to reveal a small hole. He reached in and pulled out a small box. Opening it, he smiled in satisfaction at the three keys he saw laying in the box. One was to an anonymous vault that no one knew about. The second was for a hidden potions lab that had been in his family for generations. It was under a Fidelius spell that only needed to be refreshed every hundred years. One of his ancestors had found a way to transfer the spell from a Wizard to a living plant. The large oak tree that stood in front of the lab was the secret. That something or someone other than a Wizard could be a secret-keeper was a secret of the Snape family – all the books containing information on the spell said that the secret-keeper needed to be a witch or a wizard. Severus felt smug that he was able to keep this secret from both Voldemort and Dumbledore.

The third key was for a library that had been in his family for several thousand years. It was a truly kept secret from the Wizarding world. The books there were so old that many Wizards would give their fortunes for just one of them. Only a select few had ever known about it and none, except for Severus, was alive any longer. He thought that Harry would like to know about it -- and if for some reason he died, then someone would at least know about the library. Maybe he could

find something to help get rid of his Dark Marks in the library, it would be a good project for later.

He closed the box and replaced the panel. He turned towards the bed, laid the box in the trunk, and closed it. He looked around the room one last time before locking the trunk, shrinking it, and putting it in his pocket. He turned towards the door and walked out.

Severus walked down the stair and into the formal living room. He noticed that the furniture was covered and a spell that repelled dust had been cast over them. All the breakables were gone and he wondered why they had gone. Frowning in confusion, he walked through the rooms and found all the things that were valuable were gone as well. Surely Dobby didn't have time to do all this? It was a large manor and Dobby was but one elf. The work would have needed at least six house-elves to complete it. Finally, he walked into the kitchen and stopped in shock. Dobby was in the middle of the kitchen, floating off the floor with his hands spread wide. The hands glowed with a golden light and the items in the kitchen were whirling around the room. He noticed the spell was cleaning the kitchen, putting items away, and throwing away the food. Severus couldn't believe what he was seeing. When everything was done, Dobby's hand stopped glowing and he floated back down to the floor.

He turned and looked at Severus and smiled serenely. "Dobby's is a very powerful elf."

Severus looked around the kitchen and thought about the other clean and packed rooms. "Yes, Dobby, you are. Where are the items you packed up?"

Dobby pulled a bag off his belt and gave it to Severus. "Dobby shrunk all the Professor's items and put them in the bag. Professor can store them wherever he needs to."

Severus took the bag and thanked the house-elf. "If you're done, we need to leave. The longer we take, the more likely it is that the Headmaster will find me."

Dobby nodded and followed Severus out of the kitchen. They approached the library and Severus looked around in satisfaction. The books were gone as well. While he had better books in the secret library, some of these books were favorites since they had belonged to his mother.

"Professor, where do we go next?" Dobby asked.

"I need to go to Gringotts to take care of my account. Why?"

"Dobby needs to ward the house and close the floo connection. Dobby will meet the Professor at Gringotts, if that is all right with the Professor?" the house-elf inquired curiously.

Severus thought a moment then nodded his head. "I will meet you there then." He turned to the fireplace and grabbed some floo powder. He threw it into the fireplace and called out "The Leaky Cauldron." He disappeared in a flash of green fire.

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Dobby watched as the Professor flooed out of his home. The trust the Wizard had in him was surprising. He had only thought that Harry Potter and Wheezy trusted him like that. He frowned thoughtfully, Dobby needs to find new name for Wheezy. Wheezy has a new name now.

Dobby walked over to the fireplace and disconnected the floo. He then set a ward around the fireplace to make sure that no one could get in if the floo was illegally connected. Looking around in satisfaction, he popped outside of the house and walked up to the front door. He closed it, locked it, and cast several powerful locking spells on it. He hadn't told the Professor the whole truth about elf magic.

While it may be hard to impossible for Wizards to get around elf magic, it wasn't impossible for elves to use Wizarding magic. With his freedom, he learned that hidden on the Potter property, was a community of free elves. There were a startling number of free house-elves, around five thousand, and the community was over a

thousand years old. It had been founded by the first free house-elf and with every passing year, there was an increase in the number of the elves that lived there. In order to keep the free elves safe, they decided to hide the community. It had been phased slightly outside of normal space. Only those with elf blood could pass the wards, unless invited.

Dobby was overjoyed with the community. Sage, the house-elf that worked in the castle, introduced him to the elders. When they felt his magic level and realized that he was willingly bound to two powerful Wizards by a protection oath, they began to train him, both in elf magic, Wizard magic, and fighting. Dobby would be ready when Harry finally took the war to Voldemort. He would stand by Harry Potter's side and protect him with his very life.

Dobby leaned forward and placed his hand on the door of the manor. He closed his eyes and his hands began to glow. He uttered a couple of words, and with a flash of light, a large golden sphere surrounded the house. Dobby uttered another word and the sphere turned green, then red and melted into the stones of the house. Dobby's hands stopped glowing and he took a step back from the house. He looked at the wards and smiled in satisfaction. Let Dumbly try to get past the wards. He'll be in for a nasty surprise, Dobby thought with a malicious grin then popped away from Snape Manor.

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Severus walked into Gringotts and looked around. He approached one of the goblins at the counter, put his key down, and glared at him coldly. "I would like to talk to someone about my account."

The goblin glared back and picked up the key. His glare faded as he looked at the key and he nodded his head in respect. Snape knew that the key informed the goblin that he was an important person, and that he was someone to be treated with respect. "Of course, if you would follow me." The goblin backed away from the counter and walked away. Severus followed him into an office and directed him to sit. "If you would wait, Ghistpok will be in to see you in a moment." The goblin bowed and walked out of the office.

Severus sat in the chair and waited impatiently. He tapped his fingers against the arm of the chair and huffed. He was getting restless, maybe I should've gone to Hogwarts first. I could've packed my stuff, and then done what I needed here. I have a greater chance of running into Dumbledore this way.

He knew the Headmaster would have a long day at the Ministry, but there was always an off chance that he could leave early. Merlin knows he likes to know where his slave is at, Severus thought with a sneer.

The door opened and Ghistpok walked in. "I'm surprised to see you, Severus. Especially holding that key. I thought things had gotten...complicated for you." Ghistpok inquired politely.

Severus smirked at the goblin. "They had, but now they are uncomplicated – with a little help in sorting out my situation. I need to activate my vault as I'm sure Dumbledore will have issues with me later."

Ghistpok snorted, annoyed. "Yes, he seems to be having issues with quite a few people lately."

Severus was about to ask him what he meant when Dobby appeared in front of him. Dobby looked around and his eyes landed on Ghistpok. He looked at the goblin curiously then looked over at Severus. "Dobby warded the house and the fireplace. Dobby left a surprise for Dumbly just in case," the house-elf told him with a grin.

Severus looked at the house-elf in amusement. "What did you do?"

"If Dumbly tries to break the wards, a trap will go off and Dumbly will lose his wand hand. Sadly, it's not permanent, but it will slow him down. Dobby also added a trap that will change Dumbly into woman's clothing and a picture will be taken, then sent to the Daily Prophet. Dumbly will lose creditability. Dobby doesn't like Dumbly. Dumbly will regret messing with the Professor's house," he said proudly.

Severus chuckled, his eyes filled with mirth at the thought of Dumbledore's picture in the paper. He almost wished Dumbledore

would try something. It would be amusing to see. "Dobby, you are truly evil."

Dobby smiled slyly and said, "Dobby knows this."

Severus chuckled and faced Ghistpok. The goblin was staring at the house-elf thoughtfully. "Are you Harry Potter's elf?"

Dobby stood straight and glared at the goblin. "Dobby is not Harry Potter's elf, Dobby is Harry Potter's friend," he said firmly.

Ghistpok nodded in understanding. "I believe that I have some paperwork for you to pick up. Mr. Potter told me that you would pick it up when I was finished with it. If you would excuse me a moment, I'll go and get it."

Dobby nodded and Ghistpok left the room. Dobby walked around, looking at the portraits on the wall and the gold statues on the desk and table. Severus watched him absently, waiting for Ghistpok to come back. A few minutes later, the door opened and the goblin walked into the office. He walked over to Dobby and handed him a large rolled up parchment. "This is the updated list of the inventory in his vault, his galleons, and his stocks, bonds, businesses and real estate. There are also copies of the paperwork that he asked for previously. I was going to send him an owl earlier today, but I got distracted. It seems one of my goblin assistants up and quit. He appears to have had a nervous break down," Ghistpok said with a strange smile.

Severus looked at him strangely, but didn't ask for an explanation. "Why are you doing Mr. Potter's business in front of me?"

"Simple, you're in the presence of his friend, Dobby. Mr. Potter himself told me what a trusted friend he was. If Mr. Potter or Dobby didn't trust you, neither would be with you. I have a feeling that Mr. Potter helped you with your complications."

Severus grunted in confirmation. "Dobby, I have a favor to ask of you. I need you to go to Hogwarts and begin packing my rooms and my office. Leave everything regarding the school and the teaching

position, but pack my personal things. I have potion ingredients that I need to pack personally, so I will meet you after I leave here. I also need you to check for Dumbledore. If he comes back before I get there, take what you have and come to me. I don't want to confront him yet."

Dobby nodded his head. "Dobby understands. Dobby wonders though, will Professor and Dobby leave Dumbly a surprise before we go?"

"Yes, Dobby, I believe we will," Severus said maliciously.

Dobby grinned and disappeared.

Severus turned his attention to Ghistpok. "I need you to move as much as you can from my family vault to my hidden vault. I have reason to believe that the Headmaster will try something later, possibly try to gain access to my vaults since he lost Potter's money. I want to make sure it's empty,"

Ghistpok nodded his head. "I can have that done. Luckily, your family was paranoid enough to leave family items elsewhere. The money in your three vaults should fit into your new one. The other vaults are hidden under pseudonyms so the Ministry will have no luck finding them." Ghistpok pulled out a piece of parchment and began to write. When he was done, he signed it then it disappeared with a pop. "It is being done as we speak. Is there anything else you need?"

"Not really, I have enough money to get me through a least a year. If I need more I'm sure I can find a way to get to you."

Ghistpok looked at him a moment then sighed. "I've been the manager for your family estates since your grandfather's time. You've never done anything wrong, so as such, I will let you on a little goblin secret. Mind you, if this ever gets out, I'll be dismissed from my position."

Severus looked intrigued by the comment. Ghistpok got up and walked into the small room off to the left. Severus could hear banging from inside the room. A moment later, Ghistpok came back into the

room and walked over to Severus. He slowly handed him a small bag. "This bag is one of a few that were made. We goblins decided it was too easy to get into, but if you leave it somewhere safe, it shouldn't be a problem. This is like our bottomless bags, except this bag takes money straight from your vault. It can also find family heirlooms and such. You just have to name what you need and the bag will fill. There is no security spell on that bag. Anyone that has access to it will have access to your vault. This is why we discarded them."

"I'll find a safe place to put it. Do you need to set the bag to my vault?" Severus asked.

"Yes, I need your key and a drop of your blood, please," Ghistpok said and walked around to sit at his desk. He placed the bag on the desk and looked at Severus. The lanky-haired man placed his vault key on the desk, and then transfigured a quill that was lying on the desk into a knife. He cut his finger and held it over the bag. A drop of blood fell on the bag and Severus pulled his hand back and healed his finger.

He watched in fascination as Ghistpok raised his hand over the bag and began to mutter in Gobbledegook. The bag, the blood, and the key glowed purple for a few seconds then faded. The blood was gone and Ghistpok handed him the bag and the key. "The bag has been set to your secret vault."

Severus took the bag and the key and put them in his pocket. He glanced at the goblin and asked, "I don't have to tell you that you never saw me today, right?"

"Of course, Mr. Snape," Ghistpok replied with a sly smile. "Do give Mr. Potter and Mr. Black my regards. I hear I missed quite a show with them today."

"Show?" Severus asked, confused.

"I'm afraid that is something Mr. Potter and Mr. Black will have to explain it to you. Is there anything else you need, Mr. Snape?" Ghistpok inquired.

Severus thought carefully before nodding. "If Dumbledore tries to get into my vault for whatever reason, I want you to keep a record of what he tries to do. I'm curious to see what he wants. How long will it take to empty my family vault?"

"It should be done by tonight. If you are indeed disappearing, then it will take several days for the Ministry to try to freeze your accounts if Dumbledore attempts that route. By then everything should be moved."

Severus nodded, satisfaction gracing his face. "Excellent. Until our next meeting."

"It's been a pleasure doing business with you, Mr. Snape. May the gods grant you gold."

"And you as well, Ghistpok," Severus said then got up and walked out of the office.

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Dobby appeared in Professor Snape's office and began to pack his belongings. He packed up the bedroom, then the bathroom. He went to the living area and began to pack all the items he could find. He put some on the bed, to inquire if they belonged to Severus or the school. Dobby looked around and smiled with satisfaction. Since his increase in power, it was so much easier to do housework. He could do the work of six house-elves. He took pride in that. House-elves may be slaves to the Wizarding world, but they did live to serve. It's just too bad that the Wizards couldn't let them be themselves.

After the packing was finished, Dobby decided to take the time to visit Winky. He popped out of Severus' room and appeared in the kitchen. He looked around and found Winky working by the table. He walked over to her and tapped her on the shoulder.

Winky turned around then squealed in delight. "Winky so happy to see Dobby. Winky lonely without Dobby," she said sadly.

Dobby blushed with happiness at his friend's comment. Dobby may be a free elf, but he still remembered his friends.

"How is Mutt?" Dobby asked, concerned.

"Mutt is hungry and tired. Dumbly has decreased Mutt's food again. Winky is concerned for Mutt. I's afraid Mutt is going to die if Dobby can't help him."

"Has Winky been able to find the address to Mutt?" Dobby wondered.

Winky had tears in her eyes and shook her head. "Winky can't find it. Dumbly's place is under a spell and Winky doesn't have enough magic."

Dobby patted the sobbing house-elf's shoulder and thought hard. His face brightened and he looked at Winky slyly. "Can Winky get Mutt to write a note? Dobby has enough power to find magical signature. Dobby is a free elf now and Dobby's magic is growing."

Winky's eyes brightened for a second then dimmed. "Winky cannot talk to Mutt in human form. Mutt will not know to write note and Mutt cannot write in doggy form."

Dobby looked thoughtful before asking, "What if Winky not talk to Mutt. What if Winky talk to food when serving Mutt? Winky can answer questions then?"

Winky frowned in concentration. She was not as sly as Dobby and needed to think a moment. Her face brightened and she whispered excitedly, "I's can do that. Mutt would know to write note."

Dobby nodded his head in agreement. "Mutt needs to put some of his magical signature into the note so Dobby can find him."

"Mutt not have stick to do magic," Winky sighed sadly.

"Have Mutt try very hard. Tell Mutt if he wants to escape, then Mutt must use magic on note."

Winky nodded in excitement and said, "Winky will tell Mutt that. Winky needs to feed Mutt soon. Winky must go find paper and ink. Winky is so glad that Dobby is friend and can save Mutt."

Dobby blushed at Winky's comment. "Dobby glad too. Winky let Dobby know when Mutt has written note."

Winky nodded and Dobby got ready to leave before pausing. He looked at his friend, his face solemn. "Winky be careful. Dumbly will be in bad mood later. Be wary of him," the house-elf warned.

Winky looked scared. "Winky will," she told him.

Dobby nodded and disappeared.

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Winky watched Dobby pop out of the kitchen and sighed. She walked over to the small table in the corner and rooted around. She gave a squeal of delight when she found a quill, ink and some parchment. She hoped that Mutt would understand and that Dobby could help him. Mutt was her favorite person and she hoped that Dobby could find a way to get him out of his prison before Mutt died.

Winky walked over to the counter and placed the items on the tray along with Mutt's food. She grabbed the tray and popped out of the kitchen.

She reappeared in Mutt's room and placed the tray on the table. She walked over to the sleeping man and shook him. He looked at her blearily, weakened from lack of decent food. He gave her a kind smile, but didn't move. Winky walked over to the table, dragged it closer to the couch, and began to put the items on the table. Looking at the table, she began to talk.

"Winky is glad to have parchment and ink. Winky would think that a note could be written to help someone escape. Winky is thinking that a note with magic signature would help someone find someone. Winky is thinking that maybe Mutt can write such a note. Oh, if only

Winky could be telling this to Mutt, but Winky must leave. Winky will be back and hopes to find note on Mutt's tray."

Winky turned and looked at the wide-eyed Mutt and nodded. She popped out of the room and back into the kitchen at Hogwarts. She would've stayed longer, but she knew that Dumbly watched how long she stayed. She didn't want Dumbly to have a reason to check up on Mutt. She wouldn't fail in this. She would make Dobby and Mutt proud. She would be back later to pick up the dishes and hopefully, Mutt will have written the note.

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Sirius stared at the spot where Winky had stood and jumped off the couch. At first, he couldn't understand what she was talking about and why she had been talking to the table. Then he realized she'd gotten around Dumbledore's command about not talking to him. When she left the parchment and ink, he could've cried with sheer joy.

He rushed over to the table and grabbed the parchment and quill. He sat down and stared at it, not sure to whom he should write it. Deciding to write it to Harry, he began to scribble on the parchment.

Harry,

I don't know if you'll get this letter or not, but if you do, I want you to know that I'm alive and I'm being held captive by Dumbledore.

I know its over two years since my supposed death, but I hope things are well with you. I don't know if you can find me or not, but get Remus to help you. I know he believes in everything you do, so he'll believe this letter is legitimate.

Things are looking Grim here and I hope to see you soon. I hope you can get around the devil with the four Prong pitchfork. I hope that you're up to no good and you have managed some mischief.

Until then, Prongslet.

Love you lots,

Padfoot

Sirius leaned back and looked at the note. There were enough clues here to let Harry know that the note was genuine. Sirius knew that he had to infuse the note with magic, but he was afraid. He tested the wards for the last three years and every time he had a bout of wandless magic, Dumbledore came to check out the wards.

He was afraid that Dumbledore would find out about the note and if he did, then Winky was good as dead, Sirius too.

Sirius took the ink and quill and ran over to the closet. He pulled out the small dresser and lifted up the carpet. He squatted down, lifted up the loose floorboard, and dropped the items into the hole. He replaced the floorboard and the carpet and scooted the dresser back into place.

He walked back over to the table and folded the note. He moved over to the fireplace and pulled out a small brick, which he had worked to loose during his long stay. Taking a deep breath to calm, he grabbed the note and concentrated. He felt his hate and rage for Dumbledore flow over him and his desperation gave him a boost in power. He focused the magic on the note and watched as it flared up with light then dimmed. He panted, but quickly inserted the note into the hole and put the brick back into place. He made sure nothing looked out of place and walked over to the window. Once more, he focused his hate and rage and the magic shot out of his hands and hit the wards. He wanted Dumbledore distracted from the magic hidden in the note. If his magic was all over the wards then hopefully Dumbledore wouldn't notice the hidden note. Well, he hoped he wouldn't notice.

Sirius fell onto the ground and panted. He laid there for several minutes until he heard the floo activate. He snarled at the noise, knowing that Dumbledore used the floo to taunt him, to let him know that there was a way out, but Sirius couldn't use it, even if he had floo powder. The connection was keyed only to Dumbledore, and it was watched.

Dumbledore walked out of the fireplace and looked around. He found Sirius on the floor and smiled at him coldly. "Well, well, well. It looks like the little dog has some life in him yet," he chuckled and his eyes twinkled maliciously. "What's the matter, puppy? Need to go out? Why don't you accept that you will never leave this place alive?"

Sirius snarled at him, his expression furious. "Someone will find me and when they do, I will make you regret ever holding me here."

Dumbledore tutted and gave him a mock look of kindness. "Sirius, really. Everyone thinks you're dead. Remus has moved on, and Harry is happily living his life without his godfather. Why, just today, the dear boy and I were having tea, and discussing ways to kill Voldemort. I shared some lemon drops with him and we had a great time," Dumbledore said pleasantly. His expression changed and he glared at Sirius. "Your time on this earth is close to an end, dogboy. Once I have what I need from Harry, I shall kill you both. I will finally have the power that I am destined to have, and there isn't a thing you can do about it. So expend all your energy trying to destroy the shields. It won't work and it will only weaken you."

Dumbledore smiled brightly and said, "Well, I must be off. I have to get back to the Ministry. There are things to do. Ta, ta!" The old wizard turned around and floated back out of the room.

Sirius growled with rage and began to destroy the room. Furniture went flying and mirrors were smashed. He finally expended his anger and slumped down wearily. He hated that man, hated him with every fiber of his being. He'd thought he hated Snape, but it was nothing compared to his hate for Dumbledore.

He closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the wall. He went over his conversation with Dumbledore and grimaced at the thought of Harry having tea with that bastard. There was something nagging at him though, some comment that didn't fit. What was it?

Sirius's eyes popped open and he grinned, Dumbledore was lying. He didn't have tea with Harry. His godson had always hated lemon drops and there was no way in the hell he would eat one. The old

man was just trying to goad him into anger. Sirius grimaced ruefully – well, it looks like it worked.

Sirius smirked. He may have gotten angry, but Dumbledore never noticed the hidden note. He didn't even check. The note was safe, and as long as he stayed calm, Dumbledore wouldn't be back for a while. He didn't need the Headmaster coming back to check on him. He would give the note to Winky later when she came to pick up the dishes. Sirius tried to temper his hope, but after so long he couldn't help himself. He hoped that it would soon be over with and he could be with Remus and Harry.

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Severus walked out of the floo and brushed the soot off his robe. He glanced around his rooms and found them already packed up. Dobby came walking out of his office and stopped when he saw Severus.

"Professor, Dobby has packed up your bedroom, bathroom, and living area. Dobby left some things out since Dobby not know if they belong to you. Dobby packed your office, but left the potion ingredients out. Dobby not knows enough about them to pack them. Dobby found an interesting potion for Dumbly though," he said with a smile and held up a small vial of yellow liquid.

Severus took it from him, looked at the name, and started to laugh. "Where were you expecting to put this?"

"Dobby thinks that Dumbly's lemon drops should be laced with the potion," Dobby said wickedly.

Severus chuckled wickedly and agreed. "I think it would be a smashing idea. Since the potion is flavorless, he won't even know it's there. Good, you can do that while I pack up my potions and the ingredients. I'll be sure to find something else for the dear Headmaster," he sneered.

Dobby quivered in delight and disappeared. Severus chuckled; he really liked that house-elf. Maybe the wicked side came from being a Malfoy house-elf.

An hour later, Severus had finished with his packing. Dobby shrank the items and placed them in another bag. Apparently, elf magic didn't harm the ingredients and potions like Wizarding magic did. He kept a couple of vials out for the Headmaster and looked around the bare room. He had been here almost twenty years and this was the first time he'd seen it this empty. He was glad to be leaving. It had been his prison, and thanks to a boy that he had hated and treated rather shamefully, he was finally free of the prison. Even if he died by either Voldemort or Dumbledore's hand, he will have done it while being free.

Severus stalked over to the desk in his office and grabbed a piece of parchment from the drawer. He sat down, grabbed a quill, dipped into the inkpot, and began to write a note. Once done, he signed it with a flourish and sealed it. He leaned back in the chair and tapped his chin thoughtfully. Dobby walked into the office and looked at Severus.

"Is Professor all right?" Dobby asked, concerned.

"Yes, I'm fine. Tell me Dobby, is there anyone in the castle that you trust to deliver this note to the Headmaster. I would like it delivered tomorrow during breakfast."

"Yes, Winky will have it delivered, sirs. Winky can give it to a school owl to be sent during breakfast."

"Isn't Winky Dumbledore's house-elf?" Severus asked.

"She is, but Winky doesn't like Dumbly. Winky will lie as much as Winky can. Winky will help you sir," Dobby explained.

"Very well. Winky!" Severus called out and the house-elf appeared before him.

"Yes, sirs? How can Winky help?" she squeaked. Her eyes widened when she saw Dobby, but she did nothing. Severus looked at her and it seemed that the two house-elves were having a conversation with their eyes.

"Winky, I need you to deliver this note to the Headmaster in the morning using a school owl. I need this delivered at breakfast."

"Winky can do that. Winky wonders why Professor doesn't do it?" she asked suspiciously.

"Professor is free," Dobby said and Winky's eyes widened with joy.

"Really, Dobby?" she asked excitedly and Dobby nodded his head. Winky squealed in joy and gave Dobby a hug. "Winky so happy. Dobby need to wait, Winky be back in a minute." With that said, she popped out of the office.

"What was that all about?" Severus asked sharply.

"Dobby and Winky knows Professor under Dumbly's spells. Dobby and Winky could do nothing. Winky wasn't sure to trust you."

"You and Winky could see the spells? How?" Severus asked curiously.

"Dobby could see because he is free and his magic was stronger. Dobby can sense Wizard magic. Winky could see because Winky has been forcefully bonded to Dumbly and can see his magic. Dobby and Winky knew nobody would believe them, so Dobby and Winky never told. What Wizard would believe a house-elf?" Dobby said quietly.

Severus nodded in understanding. It made sense. House-elves were nothing but slaves. They were considered lower than dogs in the Wizarding World.

Winky popped back into the room and bounced over to Dobby in excitement. She handed him a letter and grinned. "Winky got letter!" she squeaked and Dobby's eyes widened in joy.

"Winky is good! Winky is the best!" Dobby trilled excitedly.

Winky nodded her head vigorously and beamed at Dobby. She looked at Severus warily, leaned in closer to Dobby, and lowered her voice, though not low enough that Severus couldn't hear her. "Mutt

says thank you. Mutt says to hurry, Dumbly is nuts. Dumbly threatened Mutt with death," she said tearfully.

Dobby looked at her seriously. "Dobby understands. Dobby will take care of Mutt. Winky not worry. Winky did a good job."

Winky beamed at him and grabbed the note Severus put on the desk and popped out of the office. Severus looked at Dobby curiously and asked, "What was that all about?"

Dobby looked at him solemnly and shook his head. "Dobby cannot say. Dobby needs to take care of this. Dobby doesn't want Harry Potter to know yet. Harry Potter would confront Dumbly and Harry Potter is not ready. Dobby will take care of it," the house-elf growled, his eyes narrowed in anger. Severus arched an eyebrow in surprise, whatever it was about, it made the house-elf very angry.

"Very well, but if you need my help for something, let me know. I owe Potter...Harry also."

Dobby nodded his head in understanding. "Dobby understands. Is Professor ready to go?"

Severus looked around the empty office. "Yes, I believe I am. Before we go though, I want you to check to see if the Headmaster is still gone. If he is, then I need to leave him a note and some surprises," he said with a grin.

Dobby nodded and popped out of the office. A few seconds later, he popped back in and grinned. "Dumbly is still gone. Dobby can take Professor to Dumbly's office."

"All right."

Dobby took Severus by the arm and they popped out of the office. They reappeared in the Headmaster's office and the Potions Master looked around. He leaned over and whispered to Dobby, "Did you lace the Lemon Drops?"

Dobby nodded his head in excitement. "Dumbly will never know what hit him," he said with a malicious grin.

Severus snickered and walked over to the Headmaster's desk. He carefully pulled out two vials out of his robe pocket and laid them on the desk. He grabbed a piece of parchment out of the desk drawer and wrote a note.

Headmaster,

I have been called away for the weekend. There is a meeting I must attend. I will explain all when I get back. I expect that I will have important news.

Snape

Severus grunted with satisfaction. That should keep him out of my rooms until he gets my letter tomorrow morning.

Severus took the clear potion and walked over to the Headmaster's tea set. He opened the teapot and carefully poured in the potion. He lifted the teapot and swirled the potion around. After a few seconds, he put the teapot down and replaced the lid. Lacing the teapot with a little surprise for the Headmaster and for the Hogwart's staff was fun, but he reflected that being around to see the results of teatime with the Headmaster would have been more fun.

Putting the empty vial into his robe pocket, he walked over to the desk and lifted the other vial. He opened it and poured it on the Headmaster's chair. He watched as it soaked into the seat cushion and disappeared. He smiled, capped the vial and placed it in his pocket. He backed away from the Headmaster's chair and looked around. He stopped when he realized that the portraits on the wall were looking at him. Shit! They could tell the Headmaster what was going on.

"Dobby, we have a problem," Severus said urgently.

Dobby looked at him then looked at the portraits. Dobby looked back at Severus and smirked. "Dobby has already taken care of the

problem. Phineas Nigellus tried to tell Dobby to stop, and then threatened to tell the Headmaster. Dobby doesn't like to be threatened. Dobby put a spell on the portraits that will last a couple of days. The portraits can't tell the Headmaster what we did here."

Severus looked down at the house-elf, surprised. "Has anyone ever told you that you would have been a wonderful Slytherin?"

Dobby's eyes widened in surprise then smiled. "No, but Dobby thanks the Professor for the compliment."

Severus nodded and looked around the room one more time. His eyes landed on Fawkes and he wondered how the Headmaster could have a creature of light bonded to him. Did he force the bond somehow? Severus shook his head, No, you can't force a phoenix to bond. Their magic won't allow it.

"I wonder why Fawkes stays with the Headmaster. Is there something that Fawkes knows about Dumbledore that we don't?" Severus asked thoughtfully.

"Fawkes is not a real phoenix," Dobby said absently, glancing around the office.

Severus head whipped around and he stared at Dobby, his expression shocked. "What?"

Dobby noticed his reaction and nodded his head. "Fawkes is a transfigured bird. Not a real phoenix. Dobby can see the owl beneath the spell."

Severus turned to look at the Phoenix. What the hell? It had to be more than just a transfigured bird. Fawkes had rescued Harry from the Chamber during his second year and Severus himself had seen Fawkes disappear in a flash of fire. The phoenix had even swallowed the death curse for Dumbledore when Sirius was killed. So, if this was a transfigured bird, then where was the real Fawkes? Was there even a real Fawkes? Severus tried to approach the bird, but changed his mind and walked over to the window. He looked around, confused. What happened? I was going to see Fawkes.

Severus turned around and looked at the bird again. "Dobby, are there any other spells on Fawkes?"

Dobby looked at the transfigured owl and nodded. "There are at least three. Dobby not sure what the spells they are. One Dobby believes is a See-Me-Not spell. Dobby can't identify the others."

"That would explain why nobody got close to the bird. There must also be a confusion spell and some other spells to mimic phoenix behavior. I wonder though, has Fawkes has always been a transfigured bird or did Dumbledore actually have a real phoenix at one time," he mused thoughtfully.

"Dobby not know. Dobby believes a phoenix helped Harry Potter in the Chamber. Where the phoenix came from, Dobby not know," the house-elf replied.

Severus was quiet for a moment before saying, "Well, its time to go, Dobby. We left our surprises for Dumbledore, so we need to leave before he gets back. I'm ready when you are."

Dobby walked over to Severus and put his hand on the man's arm. With a pop, they disappeared, leaving behind some confused portraits and a sleeping bird.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Sirius waited impatiently for Winky to come and collect the dishes. It had been over an hour since she'd left and he paced the room anxiously. She should be here any minute.

He heard a popping noise and whirled around to see Winky at the table. She glanced at him and walked to the table. She bent over to collect the dishes and began to mutter to herself, "Winky is hoping that the note has been written. Winky needs to get note to Dobby."

Sirius perked up, joy filling him when he realized who was going to help him. Dobby was Harry's friend. Sirius walked over to the fireplace, took out the brick, reached in, and pulled out the note. He replaced the brick, walked over to the table, and dropped the note on the tray.

"I want to thank you and Dobby for doing this. Tell him to hurry would you? Dumbledore's going a little nuts and he's threatened to kill me soon. I'm not sure how long he'll wait before actually killing me," Sirius told the house-elf.

Winky nodded, still looking at the tray. "Winky is happy to be helping Mutt. Winky not want Mutt to die. Dobby will free Mutt and Winky will be happy. Winky leave now and give Dobby letter. Dobby will come and free Mutt."

"Thank you," he said softly.

Winky nodded and disappeared. Sirius stood there and stared at where Winky had been. He had hope for the first time in two years. He started to shake, Oh Merlin, please let someone find me. He turned and walked to the bed to lie down, his eyes gazing out of the window absently. Hopefully, before too long, he would be out of here, then he would make Dumbledore pay for what he had done.

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Severus and Dobby walked into the Game Room and found Harry and Ron sitting in front of the fire, playing chess. They both looked up at him and Harry smiled.

"Harry Potter, Dobby needs to go on an errand," Dobby said and Harry nodded in understanding. Dobby gave them all a smile and disappeared.

"Did everything go ok?" Harry asked, concerned.

"Everything went fine. I left a few surprises for the Headmaster, with Dobby's help of course. He should be getting my letter of my resignation tomorrow. I figure if you found the ring that would give us enough time to put it on and see if it works. Dumbledore won't be a happy man and I wouldn't put it past him to try to hurt me through the Dark Mark. I left a note letting him that I was called away for the weekend, but I'm not certain that it will keep him from going to my rooms tonight," Severus explained.

Harry nodded, stood up, and picked up a ring that was sitting on the table. He walked over to Severus and handed it to him. "We found the ring. I heard the snakes talking, so I'm sure this is it. It's also attractive enough that even you will like it," Harry said with a grin and dropped the ring in Severus's outstretched hand.

Severus took the ring and examined it. It was very attractive and he would have no problems wearing it. He'd always liked black onyx. His mother told him once that onyx stone reminded her of his eyes. She developed a fondness for them that had carried over to Severus. The Potions Master looked at Harry and gave him a tiny smile. "I won't have any problem wearing this ring. It wouldn't matter if was the ugliest thing you could find because if it does what it's supposed to, then it would be beautiful to me."

Harry nodded in agreement. "Ok, I went over the description of the ring from the journal that Tiberus James Potter, its creator, wrote. In order for it to work, I have to put the ring on your finger, and then add a drop of my blood onto the ring. Once that's done, I tell it to activate in Parseltongue and the ring creates a barrier around the Dark Marks,

cutting off the connections. Once the ring is on and activated, only I can take it off. Only someone with Potter blood can do it since it needs my blood to deactivate it. So if Dumbledore or Voldemort find out about it for some reason, there isn't anything they can do about it," he informed the Potions Master.

Severus sighed with relief. He'd been concerned about the possibility of losing the ring. He was glad to know that it wouldn't be a problem.

"When do you want to do this?" he asked Harry.

"Now would be fine. The sooner we activate it the better," Harry said with a shrug.

"Won't Tom and Dumbledore know that the connections have been cut?" Ron asked from his place by the fireplace.

Harry shook his head. "From what I understood when reading Tiberus' journal, the connection is only blocked, not destroyed. The Headmaster and Voldemort won't know that it's been blocked until they try to use the connection. Once they do, they'll realize that Severus is beyond their reach and they'll be pissed," Harry said with a feral grin. Severus and Ron looked at Harry and grinned.

"All right then, let's do it now," Severus insisted.

"You need to sit somewhere comfortable. I'm not for sure how blocking the Dark Marks will affect you, and I don't want you falling down," Harry replied.

Severus walked over to the couch and sat down. He looked at Harry with anticipation. Harry walked over and squatted down in front of him. He looked over at Ron and asked, "Could you hand me the knife I laid out?"

Ron nodded. He got up, moved over to the table, and picked up the sharp knife. He walked over to Harry and handed it to him. Harry took the knife and nodded his thanks to Ron. He put the knife on the couch, glanced at Severus before taking a deep breath. He placed the ring on the middle finger of Severus's left hand and the ring

adjusted to fit his finger. Harry picked up the knife and cut his finger, flinching at the sharp pain. He raised his finger to the ring and watched as a drop of blood rolled off his finger and onto the ring's gold snake. The snake moved and he could hear the snake's hissing getting louder.

"What is your command, Master?" it hissed.

"Activate," Harry replied and the snake began to glow. The glow began to spread down Severus's left arm, surrounding the Dark Mark on his forearm. The Dark Mark pulsated and with a flash of green light and the Dark Mark faded to a pale grey color. The glowing green light crept up the arm and down Severus' torso, stomach, and then reached around to his back. After a few seconds, Harry saw another flash of green light.

"Your will be done, Master. The Marks have been blocked," the snake hissed and ceased moving.

Harry glanced at the Mark on Severus's forearm and looked at the man. He saw that Severus was staring at the Mark, an expression of disbelief on his face. "Hey, you ok?" he asked, concerned.

"The Marks don't hurt," Severus replied, amazed. He glanced at Harry, his eyes wide and dazed. "Ever since I got the Marks, there has always been a nagging low-grade pain. Nothing could ever get them to stop hurting. It was just something that all Death Eaters learned to ignore, or used it to fuel their rage," he said.

"Eh...you no wonder you were a cranky bastard," Ron commented in the silent room and Harry snickered. Severus' head whipped up and he opened his mouth to make a snide comment when he saw the mischievous look on Ron's face. He paused then gave them a small smile. "It could very well be."

"By the way Harry, you're bleeding on the carpet," Ron stated casually.

Harry looked down and realized he forgot to heal the cut. "Crap!" he cursed and with a wave of his hand, he healed the cut and cleaned

up the blood. "Ha! What do you think about that?" he asked and looked over at Ron, who was staring at Harry with shock. "What?" he inquired, uneasy at the redhead's expression.

"I think he was shocked by the usage of your wandless magic, Harry," Severus said.

Harry looked at him and noted that Severus looked surprised. "But I told him about learning wandless magic in Azkaban. He knew I could do it."

Severus' eyes widened, his expression filled with disbelief as he stared at Harry. "You did wandless magic in Azkaban?" he asked.

Harry rolled his eyes, annoyed. "Yes, I know. I'm not supposed to be able to do magic in Azkaban, yadda, yadda. Once I gained my magical inheritance, I was able to do some wandless magic. It was hard, but by the time I was released, I could transfigure items, heal small cuts, and change into my animagus form. It's not a lot."

"Not a lot?" Severus yelped. "Mr. Potter, you don't seem to understand the importance of this. No one can do regular magic, let alone wandless magic in Azkaban, not even the Headmaster. The fact that you could heal and transfigure items in Azkaban is phenomenal. I don't even think Merlin himself could have done it. And when did you become an animagus?" the Potions Master asked.

Harry shrugged indifferently. He couldn't understand what the big deal was. So he could do a little wandless magic in Azkaban. Whoopee. It didn't help him any while he was in prison. "It happened while I was in Azkaban. I received my magical inheritance, and then two weeks later, I was begging any being who could hear me in my lonely cell to take me somewhere else, or to make me anyone else. I was surprised when I transformed into my animagus form. It was exciting for about two seconds until I realized that I could never go anywhere with it. The only thing it transforming into my animagus form did was help with the effects of the Dementor spell. Whoopee. For all I knew, I was going to be in Azkaban for the rest of my life. It wasn't something to get too excited over," he informed them bitterly.

Severus gave him a look that told Harry that the Potions Master believed he was stupid. Harry suppressed a snort of amusement. It might've been a year and a half or more since he'd been in the Potion Master's class, but he would never forget those looks. He kind of missed them in a way. "You do realize that Wizards need a potion to help them gain their Animagus form don't you?" Severus asked.

Harry nodded, chewing on his bottom lip thoughtfully. "I thought it was rather strange, but since it helped me a little, I really could've cared less at the time. I'm sure that other Wizards have spontaneously gained their animagus forms under extreme stress. Right?" he asked, not liking the look on Severus' face.

"There has only been one person to ever do that, Harry," Severus replied carefully.

"Who?" Harry asked warily.

"Merlin himself," Severus informed him.

Harry's eyes widened and he leaned against the couch in shock. That was a surprise. "So, does that mean I'm all powerful?"

"Of course not, Harry. It simply means that you're a very powerful Wizard. In fact, I'm certain you have more power than Voldemort or Dumbledore. The only problem is even though you might be more powerful, they have more experience and knowledge. You can't very well defeat either of them if you can't remember a single spell you've learned," Severus explained, exasperated.

"Missing the last nineteen months didn't help either. I need to learn what I've missed, but I can't go back to Hogwarts. I don't want to be around Dumbledore. He would try everything in his power to gain control over me and I refuse to be his pawn in his war against Voldemort. In fact, the farther I'm away from the Headmaster, the better." Harry growled.

Severus sat back and gave Harry a hard look. "I can help you. I can teach you what you need to know. I have the knowledge that you need and I can teach the Dark Arts that Dumbledore wouldn't allow

you to use. You know as well as I do that you can't defeat Voldemort by light magic only. I also know that the knowledge of dark magic Dumbledore knows is extensive. Where do think I learned a lot of my spells? Think of this as payment for the ring and your help," he said.

Harry looked at him with surprise and hope. "You would? But, you don't need to help me because of the ring. I'd have done it regardless."

"I know Harry, and that's why I'll teach you," Severus said quietly. "You didn't have to help me. I know of your real feelings for me. Our relationship was built on years of mutual hate and dislike and the fact that you helped me, even though you disliked me, means a lot to me. I would be happy to repay you in any way that I could. Even if means teaching you things your feeble mind cannot comprehend," he informed Harry with a small smile.

Harry's expression was blank for a moment before he realized that Severus was joking. He smiled at his former Professor. "I accept your offer and I thank you for teaching whatever my feeble mind can learn."

Severus smiled at him, his eyes filled with relief. Harry realized that the Potions Master hated feeling indebted to anyone. Severus would feel that this was one way to pay his debt and teach Harry what he needed to know all at the same time.

"Oi! What about me?" Ron whined.

Harry rolled his eyes at his friend. "Do you want to learn too?"

"Hell yes! You're going to need help to take over the world you know. Who better than me? Your best friend, your brother?" Ron asked

Harry turned to Ron, grinning wickedly. "I thought you didn't want to take over the world? Too much paperwork, I think is what you said."

Ron grinned, shrugging nonchalantly. "I can change my mind. Oh, you need to tell Snape about the journal."

Harry's eyes brightened and he got up and moved to the table, picked up the journal, and walked back over to Severus. He handed him the journal and sat down on the couch.

"What's this?" Severus asked.

"Tiberus James Potter's journal. He wrote down all his research on creating the ring and removing of the Dark Mark. There's a potion in the back of the journal that is suppose to the get rid of the Mark, but Tiberus was unable to complete it. He was missing a key ingredient, but could never figure out what it was. Once his friend died, he discontinued his research on the potion. If you can find the ingredient, then we'll have a way to get rid of your Dark Marks. I want you to read it and see if you can find out anything," Harry explained.

Severus looked excited as he opened the book. He skimmed through it and when he reached the last page, he read the potion formula. He gazed across the room absently, his mind racing through possible ingredients. "I will need a lab to work with. I have one, but I can't access it at the moment."

"There's one in the castle dungeons. Ron and I found it when we went exploring. There are ingredients down there as well. There was a preservation spell on everything. They should still be good. If not, then we can get what you need. From what I could tell, it's a pretty good lab if I do say so myself."

Severus gave him a sardonic look and Harry grinned. "Then again, maybe I'm not the best person to judge what a good lab is."

"Indeed, Mr. Potter," Severus said wryly.

Ron snickered and Harry rolled his eyes. He left Severus on the couch, reading the journal. He walked back to the chessboard and looked at Ron. "Do you want to continue the game?"

Ron nodded and moved over to Harry, sat down and they began to play. The fire was crackling in the background and Harry and Ron's voices were low so as not to disturb Severus' reading.

Severus' mind went over the day, hardly able to comprehend how his life had changed. He never knew that when he agreed to have tea with Potter, no, Harry, that his life would take a turn for the better. Thinking back on his visits to Hogwarts, his manor, and Gringotts, he wondered how this would turn out. He was finally free, or at least partially free, from Dumbledore and Voldemort's domination. Even if he were to die now, he would at least die doing something worthy. He would make sure that he taught Harry everything that he knew. He knew the boy needed all the help he could get. There was no way that Harry would be able to defeat Voldemort with what he knew now, no matter how much magic he had. Severus shook his head at the sense of futility that welled up inside of him. It made him anxious as he realized that the Wizarding World's best hope was on a boy who had missed the last nineteen months of his education. Seventh year students at Hogwarts knew more than Harry did right now. He sighed.

As thoughts raced through his head, he remembered the comment Ghistpok had made about Harry and Ron. He looked up at the two young men, who were arguing over a move and repressed a small smile. He was glad to see Harry's spirit hadn't been destroyed by betrayals and his stint in Azkaban, though he would never admit it aloud. "By the way, while I was at Gringotts today, Ghistpok told me to ask you about a show that he missed today? What did he mean?" Severus asked curiously.

Ron and Harry looked at each other and grinned with delight. Harry looked at Severus and asked, "Have you ever driven a goblin crazy before?" he inquired innocently. Ron snickered and Severus' eyes narrowed.

"No, I can't say that I have. Why? Have you?" Severus asked, confused.

Ron and Harry started to laugh and Severus waited impatiently for them to calm down. Harry grinned at him wickedly and said, "I would explain it, but it would lose something in the story telling. How about you use Legilimens to find out what happened."

Severus stared at him a moment, his expression stunned. "You would let me do that?" he asked, shocked.

Harry stared at him, his expression confused. "You trained me, Severus. I trust you not to take advantage of my mind."

Ron snorted, amusement shining from his eyes. "What little of it there is," he said with a smirk. Harry turned and punched his friend in the arm.

"OW! That hurt you prat," Ron whined.

Harry grinned at his friend and said, "You deserved it for being so mean to me."

Ron pouted and Harry turned back to Severus and asked, "So, will you?"

Severus nodded and pulled out his wand. He pointed it at Harry and muttered, "Legilimens." Scenes from Harry's first meeting with Glixx flashed through his mind. He was amused by Harry's dramatics, snickered at Glixx growl of frustration. He began to laugh as he saw Glixx being dragged away by Goblin guards. Retreating from Harry's mind, he smiled at the two young men. "You do know that you are both a menace to society, don't you?"

Harry and Ron grinned innocently at Severus. "Whatever do you mean?" Harry asked.

Severus shook his head and turned back to the journal. He could hear Ron and Harry bickering over who had moved last.

Two hours later, a popping noise and thumps interrupted the silence. They turned towards the noise and saw a bloody Dobby standing over a human and an elf. Dobby looked at them, desperation on his face. "Dobby needs help! Please! Winky and Mutt are hurt!"

Harry, Ron, and Severus got up and rushed over to Dobby. Severus squatted down and turned the house-elf over. He grimaced at the hole in Winky's chest. He pulled out his wand and did a scanning spell. He lowered it and looked sadly at Dobby. "I'm sorry, Dobby.

Winky's dead. There's nothing I can do for her." Dobby's eyes grew large as tears welled up.

Harry rushed over to the man and turned him over. Harry gasped, shocked, and heard Ron shout, "Sirius!" Harry stared down at the injured form of his godfather in disbelief. He knew that Sirius was alive, but to actually see him and touch him, it was overwhelming.

Severus' head whipped up at the name and he stared at the injured man, stunned. Harry looked at him, tears in his eyes. "Help him, please!" he pleaded.

Severus shook off his shock and crawled over to the injured man. He pulled out his wand and scanned him. He grimaced at the reading. "Dobby, do you know if the castle has any potions for Crucio? I also need some Blood Replenisher," he asked the shocked and dazed house-elf. "Damn it, Dobby! I need your attention!" he yelled.

Dobby started and looked over at Severus. He blinked and snapped out of his shock. "Dobby not know, but Dobby will ask. Dobby be back." The house-elf popped out of the room and Severus turned back to Sirius.

"I thought he was dead," Severus muttered, still unable to comprehend what he was seeing.

Harry glanced up at him and glared angrily. "Dumbledore," he spat, "kept him prisoner since my fifth year. I didn't know he was alive until Ron did the Emancipation Rite. Once we figured it out, we had no clue to where to look for him. He could've been anywhere."

Harry glanced down at his godfather. He placed Sirius' head in his lap and stroked his hair. There was blood on his face, a large cut on his arm and there was blood soaking his shirt. He prayed that Sirius would be all right.

Dobby popped back into the room, followed by Sage and a very old house-elf. Severus sighed with relief as he noticed several potion bottles resting in Dobby's arms.

Dobby stopped in front of Severus and held out the potions. Severus took one, opened it, forced Sirius' mouth open and poured the contents of the vial into his mouth. He closed Sirius' mouth and massaged his throat to make him swallow. He grabbed the vial of blue liquid and repeated the process. He saw some of the cuts closing. "Good," he muttered under his breath. The second potion kept bleeding wounds closed so that they could be healed properly.

Severus grabbed his wand and said a spell to remove Sirius' bloody shirt. There was a large cut on his chest that was the main source of all the blood he had lost. Severus cast a couple of healing spells and watched as the cuts healed. Soon the only evidence of the cuts were the thin white lines that would eventually fade. He cast another scanning spell and saw that the potion for the Crucio aftereffects was working. Looking over the readings, he nodded with satisfaction. Sirius was stable and he would recover. He looked at Harry and smiled wearily. "He'll be fine. I healed the cuts, and the potion is working on the effects of the Crucio spell. He should be awake by tomorrow. Until then, he needs to rest."

Harry sighed with relief and looked at Severus gratefully. "Thank you, Severus," he said with a quivering voice. He looked over at Sage and said, "Sage, I need you to get a room ready for my godfather. I need you to look after him for me, please. I have some things I need to do first, but I'll be along in a moment."

Sage nodded and disappeared. Harry looked at the old house-elf that was waiting patiently. "Who are you?" he asked quietly.

"My name is Arlen. I'm the house-elf healer. I came for the body of Winky. I need to begin the preparation of her body for burial. Were you her master?" Arlen asked with a frown.

Harry shook his head and said, "No, I'm not. I'm not even sure how she died."

Dobby looked at him with large sad eyes. "Winky saved Mutt. Winky threw herself in front of a spell meant to kill Mutt. Dumbly was quite angry and was getting ready to kill Mutt, but Dobby arrived just in time. Dobby only wishes that he had been there sooner," he said sadly.

"Dumbledore killed her? Dumbledore was trying to kill Sirius? Why? Why now?" Harry stammered, shocked.

"Dobby not know. Dobby blasted Dumbly against the wall and grabbed Winky and Mutt and came here. Dobby couldn't save Winky," he sobbed. Sage reappeared, walked up to Dobby and put her arm around him, trying to comfort him. Dobby began to wail and Sage walked him over to the corner of the room. Harry looked at Dobby then Winky sadly. He liked the tiny house-elf and he was sad that Dobby lost his friend. He also felt guilty because he was glad it was that Winky had died and not Sirius.

Arlen looked at him and asked, "May I take Winky's body then?"

Harry nodded and watched as Arlen grabbed Winky's body and disappeared. He looked down at Sirius and sighed. The Headmaster had a great deal to answer to. Dumbledore may not care that he killed a house-elf, but Harry did. That was just one of the many things that Dumbledore would pay for.

Sage finally got Dobby to calm down and they walked over to Harry. Dobby looked down at Sirius and said, "Dobby is glad that he could save Mutt. Winky loved Mutt and wanted to him to live."

Dobby looked at Harry then Sirius. Dobby's face grew determined and he said, "Dobby will take Sirius up to his room. Dobby will care for him. Winky would have wanted that."

Harry was reluctant to let his godfather go, but he knew that the man needed a bed. He waited until Dobby walked over to him and loosened his arms. Dobby knelt down and looked at Harry. "Dobby will take good care of Mutt." Harry nodded and Sage, Dobby and Sirius disappeared.

He sat a moment then looked at Severus with a fire shining from his eyes. "When can you start the lessons? I have a Headmaster and a Dark Lord to take care of," he growled. The looked in his eyes scared both Ron and Severus. They were both glad that he wasn't mad at them. Severus realized that Dumbledore and Voldemort were in

trouble and he couldn't wait to see what happened. He'd almost felt sorry for them if he didn't think they deserved everything that they would get.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"We can begin tomorrow if you want," Severus replied. He looked over at Ron and said, "If you like, Mr. Black, you may also be there for the lessons. I don't think it would hurt for you to learn what I can teach you."

Ron nodded his thanks. "I'd like that."

"Good, then tomorrow we will begin your lessons. I assume you have a place where we can duel?" Severus asked, looking back over at Harry

Harry glanced at Ron then at Severus and shrugged. "I'm not sure. We've only explored a little bit of the castle. I guess we can ask Rose or maybe Sage; either would know."

"That's fine. We can meet after breakfast to find a place to duel."

Dobby popped back into the room and walked over to Harry. "Dobby has put Mutt into the Blue room. Dobby cleaned Mutt up and he is resting comfortably."

"Thanks, Dobby. Now that that's taken care of, will you tell us what happened?" Harry asked gently.

Dobby's eyes filled with tears, but he nodded. Harry and Ron sat on the couch while Severus took the armchair. Harry pulled out a footstool and Dobby sat down. He sniffled once and looked at Harry, his expression sad.

"Winky has been taking care of Mutt for years. Dobby knew of Mutt, but didn't know who Mutt was. Winky had grown to love Mutt and would have bonded with him if she could. Dobby heard Harry Potter and Wheezy talking about Harry's godfather and when Harry called him a mutt, Dobby began to wonder. Dobby went to Winky and asked Winky what Mutt looked like. Winky told Dobby once that Winky could only talk to Mutt while he was in doggy form, but Dobby never realized what that could mean. Dobby is so sorry, Harry Potter. If only

Dobby knew, Dobby could have rescued Mutt sooner," the house-elf said tearfully.

Harry squatted before the house-elf, grabbed his hand, and patted it. "It's all right Dobby, you didn't know. I don't blame you. There's only one person to blame for all this and he will get his in the end," Harry promised with a growl.

Dobby's eyes hardened and filled with anger. "Yes, Dumbly will," he replied. His voice was vicious and his face feral. Dobby's eyes softened when they glanced at Harry. "When Dobby heard Harry Potter and Wheezy talk about Mutt, Dobby went to Winky and had Winky describe what Mutt looked like. Dobby knew then that Mutt was Harry Potter's godfather. Dobby made the hard decision not to tell Harry Potter about his godfather. Dobby knew that Harry Potter would try to confront Dumbly. Harry Potter is not ready for that, so Dobby decided to rescue Harry Potter's godfather himself."

Harry smiled at Dobby gently and asked, "What have I told you about calling me Harry?"

Dobby flushed, his expression embarrassed. "Dobby knows, but Dobby finds it hard to call Harry Potter, Harry. Dobby will try harder."

"That's fine, Dobby," Harry said.

Dobby nodded and resumed his tale. "Dobby couldn't find Mutt. Dumbly had him imprisoned somewhere and he was protected by spells. Dobby decided to ask Winky to help him. Dobby had Winky take some parchment and ink so that Mutt could write a letter. Winky was unable to talk to Mutt personally. Winky had been forbidden, but Dumbly didn't know that Winky talked to Mutt while in dog form. Dobby told Winky to talk to the table while telling Mutt what he needed to do. Mutt wrote a letter and infused it with his magical signature. Winky then gave Dobby the letter and Dobby began to look for Mutt," he explained.

"Dobby looked for a long time until Dobby finally found Mutt's magical signature. Once Mutt was found, Dobby popped to the manor where Mutt had been imprisoned. Dobby had to cancel some of the wards

and that took longer than Dobby thought. Once Dobby could pass through the wards, Dobby popped into the room where Mutt was, just in time to see Winky throw herself in front of Mutt. Winky took the curse that was meant for Mutt and save Mutt's life. Dumbly growled and kicked Winky aside," he spat angrily, his eyes sparking furiously.

"Dumbly raised his stick to curse Mutt again, but Dobby was angry and scared for Winky and Mutt. Dobby yelled and threw Dumbly against the wall with his magic, knocking out Dumbly. Dobby then grabbed Mutt and Winky and popped out. Dobby wasn't thinking and popped to Hogwarts. Dobby thought about asking Madame Pomfrey to help, but decided it not safe. So Dobby came here where Dobby knew it was safe," he said quietly.

Dobby shook his head angrily and looked at Harry. "Dobby not understand why Dumbly would kill Mutt and Winky. Winky was a good elf, a good friend. Winky hated being bonded to Dumbly. Dumbly had tricked Winky, gave her Butterbeer, and got her drunk. Winky was still missing her former master and agreed to bond, not really understanding what was going on. When Winky found out she was bonded to Dumbly, Winky was very upset. Winky wanted to be free like Dobby. Winky wanted a mate and children, but Dumbly said no. Winky died a hero, died saving someone that Winky loved. Winky is free now even though Winky will be missed," Dobby said tearfully.

Harry leaned forward and hugged Dobby, murmuring softly, "I'm sorry about Winky. I know she was your friend. I'll be forever grateful to her for saving my godfather's life. I only wished she didn't have to lose hers to do it."

Dobby pulled back, looked at Harry, and said, "Dobby knows this. Dobby also knows that Harry feels guilty about Winky's death. Dobby wants Harry to know not to. Winky did what Winky felt she had to, even if it cost Winky her life."

Harry nodded in understanding and smiled at Dobby sadly. "I know, but I still feel guilty for being glad that it was Winky and not my godfather that died. Her life wasn't any less important than Sirius' life."

Dobby glared at Harry. "Winky was glad to give up her life so that Mutt could live. It was Winky's choice. There is no reason that Harry should feel guilty. Harry would do the same."

Harry stared at his friend, amazed at the tiny house-elf. He realized how far Dobby had come from being a meek, hyperactive house-elf to an aggressive, confident friend. He would always be glad that Dobby entered his life. "Yes, Dobby, I would've done the same. All right, I'll try to stop feeling guilty. I'll appreciate and honor Winky's sacrifice."

Dobby nodded, his expression satisfied. "Good, Dobby is happy."

Harry sat back on the couch and smiled at Ron. He turned back to Dobby and asked, "So, where's the note Sirius wrote me?"

Dobby stood up and reached into his pocket. He dug around and his eyes widened before glancing at Harry, his expression concerned. "It's gone. The note's gone. Dobby must have dropped it."

Harry frowned. "The question is, where did you drop it? At Dumbledore's manor or Hogwarts?" he pondered, concerned.

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Remus walked down a quiet hallway of Hogwarts. He wandered aimlessly, not really going any particular direction. He sighed mournfully and frowned, lost in thought. He missed James, Lily, and Sirius. He grimaced at the thought of Sirius; if he knew how I turned my back on the cub, he would hate me. For once, I'm glad the man is dead. He shook off his morbid thoughts and wondered how Harry was faring.

He'd hoped that he could've had a chance to find forgiveness from Harry and he'd been devastated to find out that Harry was catatonic. Of course, that didn't mean Harry would have forgiven him. He wished he hadn't turned his back on Harry like everyone else. There was nothing to excuse his behavior. He had watched as Harry was sentenced to Azkaban and he did nothing. Maybe I was under a spell he mused then scoffed at the idea. No, I betrayed Harry all on my own, he thought bitterly. He came to this bitter realization when he

acknowledged that in some way he blamed Harry for Sirius' death. When Harry was accused of killing those students, Remus had felt a sense of justice that the boy who killed his best friend was now getting his just reward.

That realization hit him hard and he'd almost taken his own life. He betrayed his adopted godson over something that Harry had no control over. He'd broken down and wept bitterly, praying that he would die. Sadly, he was afraid of death, afraid of facing James, Lily, and Sirius. If they'd been alive, they would have surely killed him.

Now Harry was gone, along with Ron and Dobby, and he, like everyone else, had no clue to where they had gone. He noticed Dumbledore's angry behavior and wondered what was going on. Surely, the man couldn't be that upset at Ron for taking Harry. By law, it was Ron's right. He would've liked to know where they were, but Ron had the right idea. Get Harry away from everyone, keep him safe, and let him heal. Remus prayed that Harry would recover.

He was startled out of his thoughts by a popping noise and a thud. He ran towards the noise and saw Dobby standing in the middle of the hallway, looking around as if in a daze. There was a human and an elf body lying at his feet. Remus sniffed and took a step back, his face filled with shock and disbelief. SIRIUS! The human smelt like Sirius, but that couldn't be right. Padfoot was dead, he saw him go through the Veil.

He headed towards Dobby and heard the house-elf muttering, "It's not safe here. Dumbly is here. He mustn't find Mutt and Winky. Dobby must get Mutt and Winky to Harry Potter and Wheezy. They will help." Dobby leaned over and picked up the bodies, not seeing a piece of paper fall from his pocket and land on the ground. Remus howled with denial and anger as they all disappeared.

Dobby had left and taken Sirius with him. Remus wasn't even for sure if it'd been Sirius, but his nose had never proven him wrong before. Remus stalked over to the spot where Dobby had appeared and found a note lying on the floor. He bent down and picked up the note, gasping in shock. The note had Sirius's magical signature on it. With trembling hands, he opened the note and began to read.

Harry,

I don't know if you'll get this letter or not, but if you do I want you to know that I'm alive and I'm being held captive by Dumbledore.

I know it's been two years since my supposed death, but I hope things are well with you. I don't know if you can find me or not, but get Remus to help you. I know he believes in everything you do, so he'll believe this letter is legitimate.

Things are looking Grim here and I hope to see you soon. I hope you can get around the devil with the four Prong pitchfork. I hope that you're up to no good and you have managed some mischief.

Until then, Prongslet.

Love you lots,

Padfoot

"Oh, Merlin," Remus whispered. "This has got to be a joke. Why would Dumbledore imprison Sirius?" Suddenly the Headmaster's behavior since Harry's disappearance took an ominous turn. He chewed on his bottom lip, staring at the note absently. If there hadn't been so many clues that only Harry and Remus knew about, he would have thought the note was part of a cruel joke, but it wasn't. Just like the body that Dobby was carrying wasn't a joke.

"What the hell is going on?" he whispered. Frowning in thought, he wondered if maybe he should confront Dumbledore. Considering what he had learned, he decided not to. No, he would observe, he would see what was going on. He would keep a look out, and hopefully he would find his friend and adopted godson. He groaned heavily when he realized that Dobby was taking Padfoot to Ron. He knew that Padfoot would find out about Harry and the betrayal of Harry's friends. "Padfoot is going to kill me," he moaned quietly. With a shuddering sigh, he pocketed the note and walked down the hallway towards his room. He never saw the eyes that followed him

or that the dark shadowy person stared at the spot where Dobby had stood.

"Sirius?" the shadow asked with shocked confusion.

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Harry groaned, yawned widely, rubbed his eyes wearily, and looked around. He remembered what had happened yesterday evening and sat up in the bed, stunned. He hastily threw back the blankets and got out of bed. He grabbed the first t-shirt he saw, put it on, walked out of his room, and then made his way to the room where Sirius slept.

He opened the door and entered the room, making sure to be quiet so he didn't disturb Sirius if he was still asleep. Dobby looked up when he heard Harry enter the room and smiled.

"Dobby is giving Mutt a pain relieving potion. The Professor knew that Mutt would not like waking up in pain. The Professor also gave Mutt a nutrient potion. Mutt had not been eating well. Dumbly decreased Mutt's food, giving him only gruel and water. Dumbly was slowly starving Mutt to death," Dobby growled.

Harry frowned at the information. Merlin, when he finally got a hold of Dumbledore, he was going to make him pay. Harry snorted, Maybe I should ask Voldemort to help. Harry paused at that thought and wondered idly if the idea had merit. Harry shook his head in amusement, not bloody likely, though it might be fun to watch Voldemort torture the man. Harry sighed and dismissed the thought. Ron would smack me if I even brought it up, he thought, amused.

Harry sat down on the bed and looked at his godfather. It had been over two years since Harry had last seen him. His hair was longer and he had a beard. He looked older and Harry could see some gray in his hair. Sirius hadn't even hit his prime as Wizard, but he looked so much older than his actual age. I guess betrayal and imprisonment would do that to a person. Harry snorted looks as if I have a lot in common with my godfather.

Harry reached up and stroked Sirius' hair. It hit him all of a sudden; this was his godfather, the person he had considered family, a man he had come to think of as a father. When Sirius had died in front of him, Harry had lost hope of ever having a family. Now, he had a brother and his godfather was here, lying on the bed, alive and breathing. Harry's eyes filled with tears and he tried to control the sob that wanted to escape. He took in a shuddering breath and caressed Sirius's face.

"I missed you so much, Padfoot. I'm so glad you're alive," Harry whispered.

"Dobby is too, Harry. Harry needs his family," Dobby said softly.

Harry looked at the house-elf and smiled. "Yes, he does. You know I consider you part of my family, don't you?" the raven-haired young man asked.

Dobby's eyes widened and then filled with joy. "Dobby is happy that Harry considers him family. Dobby considers Harry and Wheezy family as well. Now Dobby can include Mutt and the Professor," he said happily.

Harry looked at him, surprised, and asked, "Severus?"

Dobby nodded his head. "Yes. Dobby, Harry, and Wheezy will take care of the Professor. Professor has no one but us. Professor is family now."

Harry looked at him thoughtfully, chewing on his bottom lip. "Yes, I guess he is, isn't he? He could be my Uncle." He pondered that idea a moment then grinned. "Oh, I'll have to call him that and see what he does."

"Call who what?" a voice asked behind him.

Harry turned and saw a sleepy Ron coming into the bedroom. He grinned at Ron and said, "Dobby here was telling me that Severus is part of our family now. I've decided that Severus shall be an honorary uncle. Think I can get away with calling him that?"

Ron looked at Harry as if he had grown another head. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, can you imagine the look on his face if I did that?" Harry asked with a mischievous grin.

Ron paused a second then began to chuckle. "Oh yeah. That would be great. I dare you!" he exclaimed.

Harry snorted with amusement. "You didn't have to dare me. I was going to do it anyway," he told the redhead.

Ron laughed wickedly. "Make sure I'm there when you do," and Harry nodded in agreement.

Harry heard a groan coming from the bed and he whipped his head around. He looked at his godfather intently and saw Sirius move. He leaned over him and whispered, "Sirius? Padfoot, come on its time to wake up. You're safe now, come on...wake up."

Sirius' eyes fluttered opened and they looked around the room before settling on Harry. He stared a moment before his eyes widened. "Harry?" he croaked, his face filled with shock, wariness, and hope.

"Hey, Padfoot," Harry said then burst into tears.

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Sirius floated in the darkness, his body aching. He could hear voices in the distance and wondered who they could be. He concentrated on the voices and could hear them getting closer.

"...missed you so much, Padfoot," a voice said. It sounded familiar to him.

"...Harry needs his family," another voice said. It was higher and it squeaked. It sounded like someone he knew.

"Severus?" the first voice asked with surprise and Sirius frowned. Severus? Where have I heard that name before?

"...honorary uncle..."

...serious?" another voice asked and Sirius started. Was someone talking to him? Wasn't that his name?

"...dare you..."

The voices were getting closer and the blackness was getting lighter. His body was aching and he wanted to move, to open his eyes, and see what was going on. He tried to move, but his body refused to cooperate. After a few moments, he finally moved and his body exploded with sensation. He moaned at the pain and he heard a voice talking to him.

"Sirius? Padfoot, come on its time to wake up. You're safe now, come on...wake up," the familiar voice urged and Sirius was finally able to open his eyes. He blinked back the tears from the bright light and looked around. The room wasn't familiar. The walls were painted a light blue with oak trimming and he pretty sure he hadn't ever been here before. His eyes landed on a young man and he stared a moment.

The man had long dark hair with red highlights. His face was pale with a light dusting of freckles on his nose. His eyes were a brilliant green with speckles of brown that did not detract from the brilliance of the green. He stared at moment before he realized he knew that face, that voice. It was Harry, his beloved godson who he hadn't seen in three years.

"Harry?" he asked with disbelief.

"Hey, Padfoot," Harry greeted and Sirius watched as Harry's face crumpled and he burst into tears. He was crying hard and Sirius put his arms around his godson. He pulled him close and Harry lay on his chest as he sobbed.

"I missed you much, Padfoot," Harry choked out. "I thought you were dead. I thought I killed you. I'm so glad you're alive," he sobbed and gasped for breath.

Sirius caressed Harry's back and muttered nonsensical words, trying to comfort his godson. "It's all right, Harry. I'm here now. I'm alive and I don't plan to go away again. I love you, Prongslet," he murmured softly.

Harry's crying began to trail off and after a few minutes, he sniffled and raised his head. His eyes were red and there were tear tracks down his face, but Sirius thought it was the most wonderful thing he had seen in a long time.

"You ok?" Sirius asked.

Harry nodded, sniffled, and then smiled. "Yeah, I'm fine. I just couldn't help myself. So many things have happened lately and finding out that you were alive was the last straw."

Sirius frowned, confused, and asked, "What things?"

"I'll tell you later when you're feeling better. We have a lot of things to talk about," Harry said, his expression dark and wary.

"Right you are, Harry. Now if you would move, I would like to examine Black, please," a silky voice requested.

Sirius glanced beyond Harry to see Ron, Snape and a house-elf staring at him. He looked at Snape and frowned a moment before asking, "Eh? What are you doing here?" He was very confused by what was going on.

Harry smiled and said, "That's one of the things we need to talk about."

Sirius' eyes widened and he stared at Harry, his expression horrified. "Oh Merlin, tell me you're not sleeping with him!" he blurted out.

Harry's eyes widened with shock, Ron choked, and Snape looked outraged. "Black, you stupid mutt, I would never sleep a student with let alone Harry," the Potions Master snarled.

"Padfoot, where in the hell did you get that idea?" Harry asked in bewilderment.

"Well, you said he was one of the things we need to talk about. It didn't sound good," Sirius said defensively.

Harry rolled his eyes, annoyed. He forgot about Sirius' ability to jump to conclusions. "So you assumed that we were sleeping together. Sirius, you need some mental help," he told him, sounding amused.

Sirius pouted and Harry laughed. Ron still looked a little green and Snape just sneered at him. "I wouldn't be worried about Mr. Potter's virtue if I were you. I like older men," he purred in a sultry voice. He looked at Sirius speculatively. "You're looking awfully tasty," he mused, his gaze trailing over the injured man.

Sirius' eyes widened with horror as he realized what Snape was implying. "Oh, hell no! Never, Snape, not even to save my life," he yelped.

Snape smirked at him as Harry and Ron began to laugh. Sirius looked at Snape and frowned with disgust. "That was just wrong," he pouted.

"Ah, yes, but it was so much fun. Well, for me," Snape smirked.

"Bastard," Sirius snarled mildly.

Snape just smirked at him then glanced at Harry. "If you would move Harry, I will scan him to see how he's doing."

Sirius was surprised that Snape called Harry by his first name, in fact Snape had used Harry's first name several times since he came into the room. Harry got up from the bed and took a step back. Snape leaned over him and took out his wand. He raised his wand and muttered, "Penitus Aperio" and a muted pink light enveloped his body.

Snape frowned thoughtfully and after a few moments, he cancelled the spell.

"You seem to be fine. You need to continue the nutrient potions for a couple of days since you're malnourished. I've put some pain relief potions for you on the table. You may take them whenever you need them. I think you should be up and around tomorrow, barring any stupid incidents."

Sirius rolled his eyes and looked over at Harry. "See, I'm fine. Now maybe you can tell me what's going on?" he demanded.

"In a moment. Dobby, I know I don't normally ask, but could you get us some breakfast. I want you here when we explain," Harry said.

"Dobby will be glad to." The house-elf disappeared and Sirius saw Harry glance at Ron slyly before looking at Snape. He could see the grin on Ron's face and wondering what was going on.

"Thank you, Uncle Severus, for helping my godfather," Harry said solemnly.

Sirius gaped at his godson while Snape looked at Harry in shock. "What in the hell?" Snape stammered.

Harry shrugged casually and smiled at Severus. "Well, Dobby and I decided that you are now part of our family. So as such, I dub you my honorary Uncle. Well, Ron and mine, since he's my brother now."

Ron frowned thoughtfully and looked over at Severus. "You know, I didn't think of that." The redhead looked at Snape and grinned, "Yeah, thanks, Uncle Severus."

Sirius watched as Snape choked and gasp. He pulled himself up straight and glared at them. "Don't call me that. I am your teacher and that is all."

Ron and Harry nodded their heads dutifully. "Of course, Uncle Severus," they replied together and Sirius watched Snape turn red.

He began to sputter in outrage and said, "I told you not to call me that."

Harry smiled at the man gently and replied, "We're no longer in school anymore, Severus. Dobby was right. We protect our own. You've become one of us. You'll just have to get use to it. We don't expect you to change from your snarky, mean, sadistic ways. Just know that you have family, no matter how much you don't want us."

Snape sputtering stopped and he stared at Harry with shock and ill hidden longing. Sirius watched as Harry stepped closer to Snape and placed a hand on the man's arm. "We're not the Headmaster or Voldemort. We don't expect anything from you. You can be whoever you want to be with us."

Snape looked at Harry a moment then looked away in embarrassment. "I...well..." he stuttered. He looked at Harry and Sirius could see the quickly hidden gratitude that Snape shot at Harry. The messy-haired young man must have seen it too as he smiled at Snape. The Potions Master cleared his throat gruffly and said, "Yes, well I need to do some research on the Dark Mark potion. Find me when it's time for your lessons." Snape gave Harry and Ron one last look and stalked out of the room.

Ron gazed at the retreating man and looked at Harry after Snape left. "You know, I think he likes to be called Uncle," he mused thoughtfully.

Harry nodded. "I think so too."

Sirius didn't understand what had just happened. He hated not knowing anything. "Could someone tell me what's going on?" Sirius whined. What in the hell happened over the last two years?

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Harry looked at Ron. "You think we should get Severus for this conversation? I'm sure he'll want to be in on it."

"Yeah, but let's have breakfast first. Severus needs time to acclimate to having a family," the redhead replied.

"True." Harry turned to his godfather and noticed the look of confusion on the man's face.

"Harry," Sirius whined, "why are you acting so friendly with Snape? Why is he even here? In fact, where am I? Where's Moony? Shouldn't he be here with you? He is your godfather you know, or well he should have been, but since I'm not actually dead I guess that my Will didn't actually take effect," he mused thoughtfully.

"Godfather?" Harry and Ron exclaimed, shocked. They looked at each other and grimaced. Harry frowned at the thought; if he was suppose to be my godfather, then why didn't anyone tell me? Not that it matters, the man turned his back on me. Harry felt pain well up in him at the thought. He'd been trying hard not to think of all those who turned on him, but Sirius bringing up Remus reminded him of his former friends and mentors.

Ron reached up and squeezed Harry on the shoulder. Through their bond, he could feel the pain and sadness that Harry felt. He knew how much Remus' betrayal hurt him. He felt the pain of his own family's betrayal. Many would say that he went too far by changing his family name, but they didn't have to live with what his family had done.

Harry looked at Ron and smiled. The redhead had always been there for him. Harry never blamed him for the doubts he'd had after the trial. Harry knew he himself would've been hard pressed to believe in someone after testifying under Veritaserum. Harry patted Ron's hand, his expression showing his gratitude. "Thanks, Ron," he said softly and Ron grinned.

Sirius looked at them, confused by their serious looks. What had happened to make the boys so sad? "There should have been an amendment to my will. It was notarized and left it at Grimmauld Place. I told Molly about it. She should have told you after I supposedly died." Harry and Ron looked at each other grimly; yet another thing Harry had been wronged by those who were supposed to be looking out for him.

Harry looked at Sirius and said, "A lot of things have happened in the last two, no wait, it would be three years now, wouldn't it? Regardless, too much to go over right now. We'll have breakfast, and then invite Severus back. He'll want to be here to hear your side of the story about confronting Dumbledore."

Dobby popped back into the room with their food. He stuck out his hand and a table appeared. He laid the tray down on the table and turned towards the wizards in the room. "Breakfast is served," he said with a flourish.

Harry grinned at the house-elf. "Thanks, Dobby. Did you eat already?"

Dobby beamed at Harry brightly. "Yes, Dobby had breakfast with Sage," he replied shyly, a tinge of red coming to his face.

"Really? Is there something you need to tell us about Sage?" Harry asked delightedly.

Dobby shook his head violently, his face embarrassed. "Noooo, Dobby and Sage are just friends. Sage helps Dobby."

"Of course, Dobby. If you say so," Harry said slyly.

Ron and Sirius chuckled at Dobby's embarrassment. Dobby ignored them and began to pile some food on a plate. He walked over to the bed and jumped up. He sidled up to Sirius, sat down, and carefully placed the plate on Sirius' lap. "Mutt must eat. Mutt has not eaten well for a while. Dobby will watch until Mutt has eaten everything on his plate. Dobby will care for Mutt," he said, determined, and continued to stare at Sirius sternly.

Sirius looked at Dobby then his plate. He glanced at an amused Harry and pouted. "How am I going to eat with him staring at me like that?" he whined.

Dobby grunted with irritation. "No more talk, Mutt must eat!" he growled.

Sirius looked at him, surprise filling his face. "Ah...well..." he stammered, looking very flustered.

Harry chuckled at Sirius. "You'll find Dobby has changed quite a lot since you last saw him. He's a free elf and he chooses to do what he wants. He's decided to care for you so you might as well just go along with it. Dobby can be quite um...aggressive if he doesn't get his own way."

Sirius gulped and looked at the stern house-elf warily. He picked up his fork and began to eat. Dobby sat back with a satisfied look on his face. He turned to look at Harry and glared at him. "Harry needs to eat as well. Dobby would tell Ron to eat, but that would be pointless," he said witheringly, a pointed look at Ron.

Ron was sitting at the table, gulping down food at a fast pace. He looked up and stilled as he noticed every eye in the room on him. He swallowed his food hurriedly and asked, "What?"

Harry chuckled, shook his head, and said, "Nothing, Ron. Go back to eating."

Ron looked at them with confusion then shrugged. He scooped up more eggs and placed them on his plate. He began to eat once again, a look of pleasure on his face. Harry walked over to the table and grabbed his own food. He sat down, scooping the fluffy eggs into his mouth.

An hour later, Dobby and Sirius were arguing over the amount of food Sirius ate.

"Mutt must eat more! Mutt is malnourished," Dobby said adamantly. "Mutt must not die!"

Sirius sighed, annoyed. "Once again Dobby, I can't eat all this. My stomach has to get use to the richer foods than what I've been eating. If I eat anymore, I'm going to throw up. If I do that, then all the food you forced down my throat will be for nothing, wouldn't it?"

Dobby growled and Harry decided to interfere. "Dobby," he called quietly. Dobby turned and looked at Harry, a frown on his face. "You know as well as I do that you can't make him eat if he doesn't want to. Don't make him sick. It would be defeating the purpose of trying to feed him. I know you promised, but you do need to back off a little. He's not going to keel over if he doesn't have another bite."

Dobby opened his mouth then closed it. His shoulders sagged and he looked at Harry sadly. "Harry is right, Mutt is right. It's just Dobby promised," he murmured sadly, his eyes welling up with tears.

Harry stood up and walked over to the bed. He sat down and took Dobby's hand in his. "I know you did Dobby, and you can take care of him, but you need to treat him as you would treat me. Just don't forget that he's a strong wizard, just as I am."

Dobby sniffled and nodded in understanding. He turned towards Sirius, a tremulous smile on his face. "Dobby understands. Dobby apologizes to Mutt."

Sirius smiled at the house-elf. "It's all right, Dobby. I get that you want to take care of me, even if I don't understand why it's so important to you."

Harry looked at Dobby and said, "Dobby, would you take the dishes back to the kitchen then find Severus. Tell him we would like to have him here. There are things we need to talk about. I would like you here as well."

Dobby's face brightened and he nodded. "Dobby will do so. Dobby and the Professor will be back soon."

Dobby took Sirius' plate, walked over to the edge of the bed and jumped down. He walked over to the table, placing the plate on the tray. With a snap of his fingers, Ron and Harry's plates and cups flew to the tray and Dobby picked it up, popping out of the room. Harry sat on the bed and sighed.

"Prongslet, why does Dobby care so much about what happens to me?" Sirius asked, confused.

"He promised Winky that he would take care of you. He's just following through on his promise."

Sirius sat up abruptly, panicking. "Winky! How is she? She jumped in front of curse that was meant for me," he exclaimed. "I can't believe I forgot to ask about her."

Harry looked at Sirius and shook his head sadly. "She didn't make it, Padfoot."

Sirius gaped at him then sank back against his pillows. He looked at Harry, his face filled with bewilderment and sadness. "She was a good friend. She kept me sane for the last three years. Why Harry? Why did she jump in front of that curse?" Sirius asked.

"Dobby said it was because she loved you. If it'd been Winky's choice, she would've bonded to you. Since she couldn't, she took care of you as much as she was able. She went around the bond with Dumbledore to save you, with Dobby's help, that is."

Sirius nodded in understanding and mourned the cheerful house-elf who'd taken care of him for the last three years. He hadn't realized how much the elf cared for him. He would really miss her.

The three men sat in silence, each lost in their own thoughts. Harry looked up when Severus and Dobby walked into the room. The Potions Master stopped a moment and looked at them, his expression concerned. "Is everything all right?"

"Yeah, I was just telling Padfoot about Winky," Harry commented.

"Ah," Severus murmured and walked over to sit in the chair that was sitting next to the bed. Dobby climbed up on the bed and sat close to Sirius. He gave Sirius an intent look then nodded with satisfaction.

"Now that we're all here, why don't you tell us what happened to you," Harry began. "Dobby gave us his account, but he arrived after Winky jumped in front of the curse."

Sirius nodded and closed his eyes, gathering his thoughts of the night before. He opened them again and looked at Harry.

"I was sitting on the bed, trying to read one the books that Dumbledore left behind. I was antsy because I knew that Winky was going to give Dobby the letter I wrote, and I didn't know how soon I would be rescued, or if I was even going to be rescued. I was distracted from my reading by the sound of the floo activating..." Sirius began.

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FLASHBACK

Sirius looked up at the sound of the floo. He put down the book and got off the bed. He was concerned because the only person able to come through the floo was Dumbledore. What happened? Was he going to follow through with his threat to kill him? Did he find out about the note? Oh, Harry, I hope that I'll survive whatever is going to happen. I have a very bad feeling about this.

Sirius watched as Dumbledore stumbled out of the floo. He looked at the Headmaster's face and felt fear. Whatever happened, it'd enraged Dumbledore. The old wizard looked at him with a look of malice and hate. He sneered at Sirius, his face filled with anger. "Well looky here, the mutt is ready and waiting for me like a good dog. That's good; I would hate to have to chase you around the room."

"What do you want, Dumbledore?" Sirius asked.

"I've decided I need a spot of torture to make my evening better. Since you're the only one no one would miss, I decided to come and

play with my favorite whipping boy. I've decided that tonight you die. I have no use for you anymore."

Sirius felt fear. He hoped that someone would find him soon. "What's got your knickers in a twist, Dumbly? Something not go your way?" Sirius taunted. I'm so going to die. Can't you ever shut up, Padfoot?

Dumbledore smiled at him coldly, his eyes filled with malice and contempt. "Oh, not to worry, I may have been defeated by not being able to overturn the contracts, but I'm far from finished. The war has only begun."

"Contracts? What contracts?" Sirius asked, confused.

Dumbledore laughed harshly, his eyes cold. "Do you really think I'm so foolish as to tell you anything? You're going to die wondering what's going on. I no longer have use for you." He raised his wand. "Crucio," he muttered.

Sirius braced himself, but he couldn't stop himself from screaming as he felt the curse hit him. The pain was excruciating. It felt like every nerve in his body was on fire. He fell to the ground and began to convulse. He could hear Dumbledore laughing in the distance. He didn't know how long he had been under the curse, but it suddenly stopped.

He laid there panting, unable to move. He finally raised his head and look at Dumbledore. "Is that all you got, old man? I've seen better curses from Longbottom," Sirius sneered.

Dumbledore roared with rage. He pointed the wand at Sirius and yelled, "Crucio."

Sirius felt the curse hit him again and began to scream. He could feel his throat getting sore from his screams. His body was convulsing and he couldn't feel anything beyond the pain.

The curse was lifted and Sirius lay there, sobbing from the pain. He couldn't move his body for fear of pain. He stayed still and hoped that Dumbledore wouldn't curse him again. He heard footsteps and

moved his head slowly. He saw someone standing in front of him and watched as Dumbledore squatted down. The old wizard reached out and patted him hard on his arm. Sirius moaned in pain.

"Tut, tut, Sirius. Really, haven't you learned by now to control your mouth? Or do you want me to give you another use for your mouth, hmmm?" Dumbledore asked with mock kindness as he gently caressed Sirius' mouth. "Do this for me and I might let you live a little longer," he said, his eyes dilated with lust and rage.

Sirius looked at him, horrified, as he caught on to Dumbledore's meaning. He moved his head away from the Headmaster's hand and spat on him. "I would rather die than touch any part of you with my mouth."

Dumbledore's face hardened, his eyes cold. "Very well, then you shall die." The Headmaster stood up and looked down at him with hatred. "Stand up dog!" he growled.

Sirius willed his body to move and he slowly stood up. He weaved a moment before stiffening his legs. He looked at Dumbledore in the eyes and said, "You may kill me, but know this Dumbledore, your days are numbered. Harry will find out all about you and when he does, there will be no help for you."

Dumbledore laughed coldly and replied, "Harry is my pawn, my weapon. He does what I say and when I say it."

Sirius remembered the vision of Ron's initiation into the Black family. He grinned at Dumbledore. "Does he really?" he asked innocently.

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "What do you know?" he demanded harshly.

Sirius laughed at him. "What do you mean? I haven't been out of this place in two years. I can't possibly know anything."

"Tell me what you know?" Dumbledore roared.

"Make me you pathetic, old man. You can't even control an eighteen year old boy, what makes you think I'm going to tell you a thing?" Sirius asked cheerfully.

Dumbledore growled and raised his wand. "Caedo," he said and the spell hit him on the arm. Sirius yelled out in pain and looked down. There was a cut on his arm, about six inches long and it was bleeding. He ignored the pain and glared at Dumbledore. "It'll take more than that to make me talk, you bastard. What's the matter? Losing your power?" he taunted.

Sirius got wary as Dumbledore stood there, lost in thought. He grinned evilly and called out, "Winky! Come to me."

A moment later, the house-elf appeared. "What can Winky do for Dumbly, sirs?" the house-elf asked. She looked over at Sirius and her eyes widened as she saw the blood running down his arm. "Mutt! Mutt is hurt!" she cried out.

"Yes, he is Winky, and do you know why?" Dumbledore asked in a gentle voice. Winky shook her head violently and began to back away from the old wizard. She could see the cold look in Dumbledore's eyes. "Winky not know."

"Then why are you backing away from me, slave?"

"Dumbly is scaring Winky. Winky is afraid," she moaned.

The Headmaster laughed derisively at the house-elf. "As you should be. See what happens when you lie to me, Winky," Dumbledore said and pointed his wand at Sirius. "Caedo," he yelled and the spell hit Sirius on his chest.

Sirius fell to his knees in pain. He looked at his chest and saw that blood was seeping through his shirt. He moaned at the pain and looked up at Dumbledore, his expression a little dazed.

"Better," he stated hoarsely. "But still not enough."

Dumbledore glared at him. "You will be broken Sirius, I have all night. But first I have a lesson to teach a house-elf about going behind their master's back."

"Winky did nothing you good for nothing, you arsewipe. Your own stupidity caused you to lose control of Harry. I may not have seen the boy for two years, but even I know that he would've rebelled from your tender loving care. He hated being treated like a child and I'm sure you haven't treated him any differently all the years that I've been here. It doesn't take a genius to know that he's going to rebel. From your reaction, I believe that he already has. What did he do, Dumbledore? Did he tell you to piss off?" Sirius laughed grimly.

Dumbledore glared at Sirius. "He isn't the one to worry about!" he yelled.

Sirius looked at him, confused, and asked, "Then who is?"

Dumbledore looked at him with before shaking his head. "Oh no, Sirius, I'm not telling you. You'll die without ever knowing. I tire of this," he said and raised his wand. "Reducto," he yelled.

"No! Mutt must live!" Winky screamed and jumped in front of Sirius. The animagus watched, horrified, as Winky was hit by the spell that was meant for him. Winky flew into Sirius, knocking him down to the floor. He hit his head hard and the room started to go dark. He shook his head and looked up. He saw Dumbledore walk over to him and kicked Winky out of the way.

"I'll have to get me another slave. This one wasn't very good. You don't know how much I have looked forward to this. You're one problem that I'm finally glad to get rid of. Tell Lily and James I said hi," Dumbledore said coldly. "There's no one to save you now." He raised his wand and began to utter a curse.

"NOOOO!" a voice yelled.

Sirius saw Dumbledore turn around quickly and he looked past the old wizard. He looked on in confusion and pain as a house-elf raised his hand and threw the Headmaster against the wall and held him

there. "You hurt Winky and Mutt! You must pay!" he growled and raised his hand again. The Headmaster flew against the other side of the room and slammed against the wall. Sirius watched with satisfaction as Dumbledore lost consciousness and fell to the ground.

He looked at the house-elf wearily, beginning to lose consciousness from the pain and blood loss. "Help," he muttered weakly and saw the house-elf hurrying over to them.

"You're all right now, Mutt. Must get help," the house-elf muttered and Sirius' world fell to black.

END FLASHBACK

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Sirius finally fell silent and the room was quiet. Harry suddenly jumped up from the bed and began to pace back and forth, rage filling his face.

"That's it! That man has to go! He's as bad as Voldemort, if not worse. Why? Why is he doing this? Has he always been like this or was it just recent?" Harry wondered.

Severus snorted with grim amusement. "Oh no, he's always been like that. We just never saw it."

Harry nodded distractedly. "Let's not forget what he did to you and your estate," Ron reminded him.

Harry looked disgusted. "Oh, yeah."

Sirius looked at him and asked, "What's he been doing to your estate, Harry?"

"Stealing from it. He made himself Executor of my estate and began to steal money from it. Ghistpok told me that the Dumbledore is penniless. He used it all up in the first war with Voldemort. His estate has apparently been losing money for the last hundred years."

"He was what?" Sirius exclaimed, surprised.

"It's not a problem right now, and in all truth, he didn't take much out considering how large my estate is, but that's not the point. He lied to me and stole from me. That pisses me off," Harry said angrily.

"I would say so," Sirius snarled. "Bastard! Tell me you put a stop to it."

"Ron did it for me," Harry said proudly.

"Why would Ron do it for you?" Sirius asked, as he looked Harry then Ron.

Harry glanced at Ron and Severus then sighed. He fidgeted on the bed and began to bite his bottom lip. Sirius was looking at him suspiciously, yet with a good deal of concern also.

Harry heaved a huge sigh and looked at Sirius, pain filling his eyes. "Almost two years ago, I was convicted of murder and sent to Azkaban," he informed his godfather softly.

Sirius looked at him, astonished. His mouth was hanging open and his eyes were bulging. He was silent a moment before his mouth clicked shut and his eyes narrowed.

"Bullshit!" he exclaimed. "You would've never killed anyone, and if you did, it was only because you were defending yourself. I don't know what's going on, but that's just not true," Sirius stated firmly.

"They had proof and I confessed under Veritaserum," Harry said softly. He saw Ron opened his mouth in outrage and held up his hand.

"You did?" Sirius squeaked and Harry nodded. The animagus stared at him a moment then shook his head. "You didn't do it. I don't know what plan Voldemort had, but you didn't kill anyone Harry -- no matter what you confessed. Everything magical can be gotten around if you try hard enough. It doesn't matter if you're on the run, which I assume you are. We can be on the run together."

Harry's eyes welled up with tears and he began to cry. His godfather believed him. He didn't know that Harry had been proven innocent and released; he just knew that Harry hadn't killed anyone and was willing to stay with him regardless. Harry cried softly and Sirius sat up, pulling him into his arms.

Sirius stroked his hair and said softly, "It'll be all right, Harry. We'll find your proof and we'll show everyone that you're innocent. I'm here; Ron, Dobby, and Snape are here. I'm thinking they believe that you're innocent or else they wouldn't be here. We'll work together on finding out what happened."

Harry continued to cry, releasing pent up emotions that he tried to repress since his release from Azkaban. Sirius' faith in him overwhelmed him. He calmed down and lay limply against his godfather, sniffing a couple of times before looking up. He saw that Ron's had tears in his eyes and look of guilt on his face. He held out his hand and Ron grabbed it, squeezing gently. "It's all right, Ron. I told you that I forgave you. Hell, there wasn't a reason to forgive you. I wouldn't have done the same."

Ron nodded and wiped away the tear that slid down his face. He held onto Harry's hand with a tight grip as if Harry would disappear. Harry knew that though they tried to hide it, there were still a lot of hurt feelings for the both of them. Only with time would they get better.

"Why is Ron so upset?" Sirius asked softly.

"After everyone turned their backs on me for being a murderer, only Ron stayed with me. He believed in my innocence and made sure that everyone knew. He was the only one. I didn't know then that Severus believed in my innocence. When I confessed under Veritaserum to the murders, Ron felt betrayed and began to believe that I might have actually killed them. He feels guilty about it, but I told him that even I would've been hard pressed not to do the same thing. Veritaserum is supposed to be the one thing that is impossible to lie under," Harry explained.

"So how did you confess?" Sirius asked.

"At the trial, Voldemort managed to take control of my mind for a moment with the help of Malfoy, who was in the audience under a Polyjuice potion. Once Voldemort took hold, he forced me to lie. So I was convicted and thrown into prison."

Sirius's jaw clenched with anger and asked, "How long were you there before you escaped? How did you escape?"

"Eighteen months, not counting the month I was detained for my trial and I didn't escape. Apparently the Malfoys; Lucius and Draco, were captured and questioned several weeks ago. They confessed to Voldemort's plan to frame me. Draco was the one to kill the students and he framed me. Once it was known, I was taken out of Azkaban and sent to Hogwarts where I was to heal," Harry said with contempt.

Sirius nodded his head, looked at Harry thoughtfully and asked, "Who did Malfoy kill?"

Harry glanced at Ron then turned back to Sirius. "Colin Creevey, Cho Chang and," Harry paused and uttered softly, "Ginny Weasley."

Sirius gasped and looked over at Ron. He gave him a look of sorrow and compassion. "I'm sorry, Ron."

Ron's jaw clenched a moment as he held back the pain. He gave Sirius a grim smile. "Thanks, Padfoot," he said softly.

Sirius turned back to Harry and asked, "Why did you need to heal? Were you hurt?"

Harry snorted with amusement as Ron began to laugh. He even heard Severus give a chuckle or two. "Apparently, I'm catatonic with very little hope of getting better," he intoned solemnly, mirth dancing in his eyes.

Sirius began to laugh wickedly and asked, "Dumbledore thinks you're catatonic? Oh, that's priceless."

Harry chuckled. "And as long as Dumbledore thinks that, the more time I have to learn and to prepare."

"What do you mean prepare?" Sirius asked.

"Right now, Ron and I have Dumbledore at a standstill. He can't do anything to me without losing his magic and we have documents proving his theft from my estate. For now, that'll keep him quiet, but I don't believe that he'll just sit idly by and do nothing. So in the time that I have before he strikes, I have to prepare for him and Voldemort," Harry explained.

"How would Dumbledore lose his magic?" Sirius asked and Harry proceeded to tell him about the contract that he had Dumbledore unwittingly sign. He also explained how Dumbledore lost control of Harry's assets and Sirius had to laugh at their ingenuity.

"So that's what pissed Dumbledore off. He said something about not being able to overturn a contract. He also doesn't think you're the threat right now, Harry. He told me that it was the 'other one' he was more concerned about," Sirius informed them.

Harry turned to Ron, delight showing on his face. "Ron, you have the Headmaster worried. Good for you! We each have our own little Dark Lord after us. Ahh...the joy of it!" he sighed whimsically.

Ron snorted with mock annoyance and said, "Sure, give me the old guy." Harry laughed.

"Harry," Sirius started quietly, "where was Remus during all of this? He's supposed to be your godfather."

Harry glanced at him sadly before looking away, his jaw clenched in anger. "I never knew that Remus was supposed to be my godfather. Molly kept that little fact from me. Whether it was by her choice or Dumbledore's, I'm not sure, but I had no clue. I'm not even sure if Remus knew or not. Regardless of that fact, Remus didn't believe in my innocence. He told me at the trial that you would've been ashamed of me, that if you'd lived, you would've killed me yourself. He proceeded to tell me that I should've been drowned at birth to save all of you the trouble. He turned his back on me, Padfoot," he

said, swallowing the hurt he felt. "I don't know why he didn't believe me. He hurt me, Padfoot."

Sirius sat frozen a moment then growled in rage, "That bastard! He was supposed to be your new godfather. He was supposed to take care of you. How could he turn on you like that? You were the last of our family. If I ever get a hold of him, I'll kill him. Then I'll have a damn good reason to be sent to Azkaban."

"No!" Harry exclaimed, his face panicked. "You can't kill him. He may have hurt me, but I don't want him dead. I can't lose you again, Sirius."

Sirius crossed his hands and pouted. "Fine, then I'll have Snape kill him for me," he said cheerfully.

"I'd be happy to," Severus smirked. "In fact, I have this new potion that involves silver nitrate and..."

"NO! Damnit! No killing Remus," Harry exclaimed.

Severus slumped back in his chair with a pout and began to mutter, "Fine, ruin all my fun. Maybe I can torture him instead?" he asked with a hopeful look at Harry and Sirius chuckled.

Harry began to shake his head then paused. He frowned thoughtfully, nodded, and said, "All right you can torture him, but nothing too harmful or permanent."

Severus grumbled some and Sirius butted in with a perky, "Fine." He looked at Severus and grinned slyly. "We'll talk later." Severus gave him a regal nod and looked satisfied.

Harry looked at them and shook his head in exasperation. "They act like children," he mumbled.

Severus snorted and glared at Harry. "Oh, and who contributed to driving a goblin mad?" he asked with sarcasm.

Harry grinned as Ron laughed merrily. Sirius looked between the two of them and asked impatiently, "What? What did you do?"

Harry explained what they done to the goblin they had dubbed as Susie. Sirius started laughing and looked Harry and Ron with pride. "You two are true Marauders. If you had an animagus form, I would induct you into the club."

Harry looked Ron with a mischievous smile and got off the bed. Sirius looked at him, confused, as he backed away from the bed. With a wicked grin, he transformed into his animagus form. He shook his body, jumped on the bed, and began to lick Sirius on the face. He turned and yipped at Ron and Severus, who were looking at him with awe.

Sirius lifted his hand to pet him. "When did this happen? How long did it take?" Sirius asked, happiness filling his face. Harry quivered with pleasure and literally melted onto the bed as Sirius continued to pet him. His tongue lolled out of his mouth and he wiggled with delight when Sirius scratched him behind his ear.

"Wow, Harry, you're beautiful. You're a silver wolf with green eyes. There's even a tuft of black fur where your scar would be. Do you have a name yet?" Sirius asked.

Harry sat up and shifted back to his human form. He shook his head and said, "No, I haven't really thought about it. It came as a surprise to me when I gained my form and since then thinking of a name has been my last concern."

"What do you mean a surprise?" Sirius asked.

Harry explained to him about how was able to use wandless magic in Azkaban. He told him about how he spontaneously transformed one night without the aide of a potion. Sirius stared at him, his expression stunned, and Harry poked his godfather. "Padfoot? Hey, Padfoot? Yo! Paaaadddfffooootttt," Harry sang out and waved his hand in front of his godfather's face. Nothing happened; he didn't move nor did he blink.

"I think I broke him," he grinned at Ron.

Ron grinned back. "It looks like it. So, what's your animagus name?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "I'm open to ideas."

"How about Silver?" Ron asked.

Harry shook his head. "Too obvious."

"Prata?" Severus suggested.

"Are you calling me a prat?" Harry asked with mock outrage.

"No, you dunderhead. It's Portuguese for silver."

"Oh, well thanks, but no. It sounds like an insult every time someone says my name," Harry said.

Severus smirked and asked, "And your point is?" Harry rolled his eyes as he grinned at the Potions Master.

"Argent?" Ron asked.

Harry frowned in thought and asked, "Isn't that French for silver?"

"Yep," Ron answered.

Harry shook his head. "Again, too obvious."

"Argentum?" Severus inquired.

"That would be?" Harry asked.

"Latin for silver," Severus grinned.

"Silber?" Ron wondered with amusement. "It's German for silver."

"Ron, again with the obvious," Harry said with a mock growl.

"Argento?" Severus asked, obviously smothering a smile. "It's Italian for Silver."

"You guys," Harry whined. "They all sound alike and are obvious."

"Plata? It's Spanish for silver," Sirius piped up. He'd finally gotten over his shock and decided to throw his two-knits worth in.

"Still sounds too much like an insult," Harry explained with a grimace.

"Celevon," Dobby mentioned. Harry looked at him with surprise.

"Celevon?" Harry asked and rolled the word around on his tongue.

Dobby nodded. "It's Elvish for silver."

"You have your own language?" Harry asked.

Dobby nodded eagerly and explained, "We do, but that's not from my language. It's from the High Elves. They left this land many centuries ago, but my people kept records of their language. I just thought I would suggest it."

Harry looked at him with surprise and asked, "Dobby did you know that you're talking differently."

"I know of this. I have growth spurts if you will, due to my magic. Since its no longer being suppressed, many things are changing for me. My intelligence is one of them," Dobby explained.

"Wow, Dobby that's great. Just to let you know though, you were always a smart in the first place," Harry said with a smile.

Dobby blushed and hid his face, embarrassed by Harry's complement. "Dobby thanks you Harry," he stammered, reverting to his original speech pattern. Dobby cleared his throat, grinning sheepishly. "As you can tell, it's not fully integrated yet. I will fall back on it when I'm emotional. It should be another couple of weeks before its permanent. Until then, I will change speech patterns, depending on the situation."

"Gotcha," Harry said.

"You never said Harry, did you like that name?" Ron asked.

Harry nodded his head eagerly. "Yes, I did. It's different. I think I'll keep it. Thanks, Dobby."

Dobby blushed. "You're welcome, Harry."

"So, what else has been going on in the last three years that I should know about?" Sirius asked.

"Did you know that you're a free man?" Ron asked cheerfully.

Sirius' head whipped around and he stared at Ron. "What?" he asked.

"Yep, a couple of years ago, Wormtail was captured and questioned under Veritaserum. He told everything, about how you weren't the Secret Keeper and how you hadn't betrayed the Potters. He also told the Aurors about how he framed you for the deaths of the Muggles that he killed. After hearing that, the Ministry declared you innocent of all charges. You're a free man. Of course, you're supposed to be dead too. Wonder how that's going to work out," Ron said thoughtfully.

"You think Dumbledore's going to try something?" Severus asked.

"Not if he doesn't want us to go public about his theft he won't," Harry growled.

Ron nodded in agreement. "You know that's only going to hold him off for so long. We need something more on him. Something that will show what kind of man he really is."

"Well, I could contribute to the evidence, but again, it's not enough," Sirius said. "I think I need to lay low for now."

"Yeah, but where are we going to get the evidence we need? No one wants to believe that Dumbledore is anything but the kind, gentle, benevolent man that he portrays. The Ministry and the Wizarding World will look at us like we're crazy," Harry said with irritation.

They were quiet a moment before Sirius piped up, "How about you tell me about the changes in your appearance. I thought it was your mother coming through, but now I'm not so sure."

Harry looked at Ron and grinned at him. "Ron and I went through the Blood Rite. We bound ourselves together as brothers. After the Rite, we noticed some subtle differences in our appearances. I took some of his; like the red hair, lighter skin, the freckles, speckles of brown in my eyes whereas Ron took some of mine; the black hair, darker skin, less freckles and green speckles in his eyes. We also have a bond in the back of our minds where we can feel each other's emotions, if they're strong enough. Ron's magic is also a bit stronger just as it was when you accepted him into your family," Harry explained.

Sirius looked at Ron and smiled in delight. "That's right, you're a Black now. That makes you my son, errr...no, nephew. I'm way too young to have a son," Sirius said with a sniff.

Ron laughed at Sirius' antics. "But Dad," he whined.

"We'll have none of that my boy," Sirius said with a stern look.

Harry snickered. "Threaten to send him to bed without his supper. That'll get to him."

Ron looked at Harry, his expression horrified and betrayed. "No! Don't take away my food."

Harry and Sirius laughed, while Severus rolled his eyes. Dobby frowned disapprovingly at the comment. "Ron needs to eat. No taking away his food," he commanded sternly, shaking at finger at Harry and Sirius.

"I would never do that, Dobby. Ron would be crushed," Sirius informed him and Dobby gave him a smile of approval.

"I do have a question though, why did you decide to do the Rite? Not that I mind you being part of the family, but why?" Sirius asked.

Ron's expression turned serious. "Let's just say that Harry wasn't the only one that was betrayed by his friends and family. My former family didn't like the fact that I believed in Harry. They took every opportunity the last nineteen months to let me know that. When Harry released from Azkaban, I decided that it was a perfect opportunity to leave my family. Plus, Harry needed me and I was going to help him."

"Have you talked to any of your former family since the Rite?" Sirius asked Ron.

"No, and I don't want to, except maybe Percy. His breaking away from the family makes much more sense now. We'll see. Just because I broke away from the Weasleys doesn't mean that Percy will have anything to do with me. I'm still hanging out with Harry and that was one of the reasons he broke away from the family. Him and Dumbledore," he said then paused. He frowned thoughtfully before saying, "You know, he obviously disliked Dumbledore after he graduated Hogwarts. I always thought it was because of Fudge, but what if it's more? What if Percy found out something about Dumbledore?"

Harry looked at Ron sharply and nodded thoughtfully before saying, "Not sure, but it's something we can check out if you want. That would mean you would have to get a hold of Percy without letting Dumbledore know about it. You know he has spies in the Ministry."

"I'll see if I can talk to him later," Ron said.

Severus stood and looked at them. "Well, if we've discussed everything, then Harry and Ron need to get ready for their lessons."

"Lessons?" Sirius asked.

"Severus is teaching Ron and me the spells we need to learn to prepare for Dumbledore and Voldemort. Plus, I have nineteen months of lessons that I missed while I was in Azkaban," Harry explained.

Sirius perked up. "If I had a wand I could help. I was once an Auror, you know. Think you could use some help?"

Severus looked at him thoughtfully, and then nodded his head. "I think if we alternate, we can teach them what they need to learn."

"Great! Then I'm going to get dressed and go to Ollivander's to get a wand. I'll be ready to teach late," Sirius said excitedly.

"NO! Mutt stays in bed. Mutt was injured and must heal. Mutt will do nothing until tomorrow," Dobby growled.

"Dobby," Sirius whined. "I'm fine."

"Don't make Dobby tie Mutt to the bed because Dobby will," he said fiercely.

Sirius tried to stare Dobby down, but the house-elf glared at him until Sirius sighed with annoyance. "Fine, I won't do anything until tomorrow. But you have to entertain me because if I have to stay in the bed and do nothing, I'm going to go mental."

Dobby calmed down. "I can do that."

"Harry, Ron let's go find a place to duel," Severus said before turning, and walking out of the room.

"Later, Padfoot," Harry called out.

"See you at lunch, Celevon," Sirius replied.

Together Harry and Ron walked out of the bedroom, leaving Sirius and Dobby talking about pranks.

As Harry walked out of the room he heard Sirius exclaim, "You laced the Headmaster's lemon drops with what?" then burst into laughter. Harry looked at Ron, an exasperated look on his face. "Remind me to ask them what that was about at lunch please." Ron grinned and nodded.

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Caedo – Latin – to cut

Celevon – Elvish for Silver

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Dumbledore stared out the window from the Room of Requirement. He was lost in his thoughts. Things were not going well for him and he hated it. He hated not being in control. The loss of Sirius was only the beginning.

He turned back towards the room and surveyed the damage. He came here last night to destroy whatever he could get his hands on. The rage he felt over losing Sirius was overwhelming. His body hurt from the bruises that Dobby had inflicted upon him when he threw him against the wall. He couldn't understand how Dobby managed to find Sirius. He was sure it had something to do with that pathetic little house-elf he killed last night. He just couldn't understand it. The wards around his house were powerful, very powerful. It was also under a Fidelius spell so that no stupid house-elf should have ever found it. How could a pathetic, insignificant house-elf find his hidden home?

He lost Harry, Harry's money, and now Harry's Godfather. A young, insipid brat and a pathetic house-elf were beating him at a game he'd been playing successfully for years. How? How could they be destroying his plans? He was the most powerful wizard on earth and he'd spent years making and nursing these plans along. With the defeat of Voldemort and the death of the Boy Who Lived, Dumbledore would be the richest and the most beloved Wizard in the world. He would have held a position of power that would've been uncontested. But now, things were going wrong. Years of machinations were being pulled apart.

He paced, there had to be a way that he could work with this. For now, he'd lost Harry, but he still hoped that he would find him. His visit to the Ministry yesterday did not provide him with any good news. He found the solicitor that Harry used to draw up the contracts, Patrice O'Connell. When he asked him about overturning the contracts, the man just smirked and said there was nothing he could do. Dumbledore growled at the insolence of the man. He vaguely remembered him from his time at Hogwarts, and if he remembered correctly, Mr. O'Connell had been a Slytherin.

Unsatisfied with his visit with Mr. O'Connell, he went to the Ministry. He called in a couple of favors and had Harry's legal documents checked out. His friend, Barry Tooley, said that although the document was unusual, it had a legal standing and Dumbledore could do nothing to overturn it. If he did, then the contract he unwittingly signed would be in effect and he would lose his magic. He turned sharply and hissed as the large bruise on his back twinge in pain.

He thought about visiting Poppy for a potion for his bruises, but decided against it. It would raise too many questions as to why he was injured. Questions he didn't want to answer. He called upon Severus to brew him a potion, but Severus hadn't been in his room. When he went back to his office, he found the note letting him know that Voldemort had called Severus and he would likely be gone for the rest of the weekend. Dumbledore sneered at the thought of his pet spy. He thought that maybe it was time to teach his little spy a lesson. Severus hadn't had permission to leave. I think that Severus' usefulness is over. He hasn't had any information that was worthwhile for months. I think Voldemort knows that he's a spy and he is using him to throw me off. I think its time for Severus to die a heroic death he thought with a sneer.

His pacing slowed and his mind began to clear. His anger, while still there, began to cool. He would not be defeated. He'd put too many years into his plan and he'd gotten too far now to back out. I will have my power even if I have to kill Voldemort and take over myself. Those who have defied me will cower in fear before me. I will make them regret ever thinking about going against me.

Dumbledore sighed, walked over to the door, opened it, and walked out. He made his way up to his office. I think some lemon drops and a cup of tea will help me regain my good mood. It's time to put on the mask again.

His expression became benevolent and kind. His eyes twinkled merrily and his humming was cheerful. He was the epitome of a kindly grandfather. No one looking at him now would know that underneath the exterior lay the heart of a very evil and sadistic man. They didn't know that the man's darkness could rival, if not surpass,

Voldemort's. They only saw what Dumbledore wanted them to see. As for those who saw beneath it, well most of them were dead.

Dumbledore smiled cheerfully at the students roaming the halls. He nodded a greeting to the teachers that he saw as he made his way up to his office. Upon entering his office, he looked around making sure that everything was as it should be. He'd noticed last night that something felt out of place, but he wasn't sure what it was. He shrugged it off, believing it to be his own paranoid mind. He walked over to his desk and sat down. He frowned a moment when he felt a slight tingle pass throughout his body. He looked down, but didn't see anything amiss. Putting it out of his mind, he called for a house-elf to fill up his teakettle. He grabbed his small bowl of lemon drops and began to eat them. He noticed idly that they tasted a little sweeter than normal.

He frowned at the cowering house-elf who appeared with his tea. He realized that he needed another slave. Dumbledore snorted, If I could find that nuisance of a house-elf Dobby, I bet I could force a bond with him. Then I would teach him the true meaning of fear. Dumbledore was slightly cheered by that thought and sipped his tea. He finished his cup and looked over at his clock. Ah, time for breakfast.

He sighed, annoyed at having to spend time with the teachers and the annoying brats, but one must do things they don't like in the climb for power. He made his way to the Great Hall and smiled pleasantly to the students that he saw on the way. He walked up to the table and nodded towards the teachers. He sat down and waited for a plate to appear before him. The Headmaster didn't notice the stares and the whispers that followed him as he came into the Great Hall. His mind was full of his own thought and plans.

"Albus, what are you wearing?" Minerva asked, her voice shocked.

Dumbledore looked over at her and frowned. "Whatever do you mean? I'm wearing my purple robes. Why?"

"Albus, I don't know what foolish game you're playing right now, but really, you shouldn't dress like that in front of the children. What you do in your own bedroom should stay there."

Dumbledore looked at her, confused, and asked, "Whatever do you mean, my dear?"

Minerva gave him look of disapproval. "When did you start wearing leather pants, a leather harness, and a collar? I have to say that I'm ashamed of you. Can't you keep things like that out of the public eye? What would the children's parents say?"

Dumbledore looked down, but saw nothing but his purple robes. He suddenly remembered the tingle he felt when he sat down at his chair. He growled softly and said, "It looks as if I'm a victim of a prank. All I can see are my purple robes."

Minerva's lips were a thin white line and said sourly, "Whatever, you need to do something about it. It looks absolutely disgusting."

Dumbledore felt another tingle as he opened his mouth to agree, but what came out was, "Really, Minerva, you need to get laid. A good hard fucking would change that attitude."

Minerva's eyes widened with shock and outrage. Dumbledore couldn't understand what was going on. He hadn't meant to say that even if he did think it. He had a sinking feeling that this was not going to be a very good morning.

"Albus, I never!" she screeched. The Great Hall became silent; the students were watching the two teachers curiously. They had never heard Professor McGonagall raise her voice like that.

"Merlin knows you need to. You're a pussy, use it," he said loudly. Oh Merlin, he couldn't stop what he was saying.

"Headmaster?" Professor Sprout asked in shock. "Are you all right?"

"Mind your own business, you lard ass. Nobody wants your opinion or concern," Dumbledore stated.

He watched with distant horror as the woman's face become red and the look of rage appeared on the normally cheerful woman's face. He felt a tingle spread throughout his body and he felt his penis become erect. His face flushed red as he became hard. What the hell is going on here? Merlin knows that he was too old for the um...physical responses that he felt.

"Headmaster Dumbledore? Are you feeling well?" Hermione asked, concerned. She was staying at Hogwarts to help Professor McGonagall with her classes. Professor McGonagall was planning to retire in a couple of years, so she was training Hermione Granger to take over teaching Transfiguration.

"Shut up, you little twit. The only thing you're good for is good hard screw. Get over here so I can show you how it's done," he said and stood up. The Great Hall gasped with horror as the Headmaster stood up. He was quite obviously aroused and the black leather pants that he was wearing didn't leave anything to the imagination.

There were many queasy looks from the students and Hermione stood up, outraged. "I don't like your behavior, Headmaster."

"You know you can do more with that mouth than just talk, don't you. Why don't you get on your knees and show me all that knowledge you seem so good at spouting. Maybe I can finally find a way to shut you up. Merlin knows I've listened to you spout crap out of your mouth for years. I think I need a reward for putting up with you," Dumbledore said with a leer while in the back of his mind he watched horrified as Miss Granger reached up and smacked him.

"I don't know what is wrong with you, but I will not be talked to like that," she said, outraged.

Poppy, who'd been watching from the doorway of the Great Hall, walked up towards the Head Table and looked Dumbledore over. She looked at him intently, pulled out her wand, and began to scan him. She nodded to herself. "He seems to be a victim of a prank. I have found a couple of foreign potions in his bloodstream. I'm not for sure

what they are, but it would be the reason for his odd behavior. I need to get him up to the infirmary."

Poppy grabbed the Headmaster by the arm and dragged him out of the Great Hall. The nauseous students could hear the Headmaster begging Poppy to sleep with him. They shuddered at the thought and went back to eating. The Slytherins were smirking as they made mental notes to send their parents letters of today's events. Though they couldn't do anything to discredit Dumbledore, their parents could make the event public therefore embarrassing the Headmaster. That would be one slur against the old wizard, even if it wouldn't last very long. Dumbledore would still be humiliated. They grinned at each other and began to eat.

Eyes watched as Madam Pomfrey dragged the Headmaster out of the room. A smirk appeared on a pair of lips at the thought of letting the Watchers know about today's events. Wondering if maybe they could milk the events of the morning, the owner of the eyes got up from the table and left the Great Hall, chuckling. I think that Elizabeth Cameron will get a kick out of today's events. I'll have to be sure to tell her.

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An hour later, Poppy had neutralized the potions, and the Headmaster was back to his regular self. He was feeling very embarrassed and angry at whoever pranked him. He had no idea where the potions came from or where he ingested them. He stomped back to his office, threw open the door in a rage and slammed it so hard that the glass trinkets in his office rocked from the force. He began to pace back and forth. Someone had made him look like a fool and that someone would pay dearly as soon as he found out who it was. He paused a moment in thought, his first guess would've been Severus, but with the spells he'd forced on the man, he wouldn't have been capable of such an act.

The Weasley twins were out as they hadn't been at Hogwarts since the night Harry was released. Sirius had been a hostage in his home so there was no way that it could've been him. He wouldn't have had time to prank him. Dumbledore whirled around and winced in pain.

He huffed, frustrated, and walked over to his desk. He started to sit down when he remembered the tingle that he felt earlier. He stepped away from the chair, and in a fit of rage, destroyed it with a spell. Feeling a tiny bit better, he transfigured another chair and sat down. He tapped his finger on the desk as he went through a list of people who had access to his office. He frowned and looked at the portraits. They would normally tell him if anyone had been here, but they hadn't said a word.

Taking out his wand, he pointed it at one of the portraits and uttered a spell. He glared when he realized there were traces of a spell on the portraits forbidding them to talk. He didn't recognize the magical signature or the spell. He tried to cancel the spell, but nothing worked. With a yell of frustration, he got up from his chair and began to pace once again. He frowned thoughtfully and looked around his office.

He began to randomly check items and found that his lemon drops and his teakettle had been laced with potions. He now knew how he ingested the potions, but he still didn't know who had done it.

A house-elf popped into his office and trembled at the glare the Headmaster gave her. She walked forward and placed a rolled up parchment on his desk.

"Begging Headmaster's pardon, sirs, Twilly is giving the Headmaster a letter. Winky gave it to Twilly to give to you in case Winky was gone. Winky didn't show up this morning so Twilly is giving you the note," she said in a hurry then popped out of the office.

Dumbledore looked at the rolled up parchment warily. He carefully grabbed the note and unrolled it. He read it, his eyes widened, and then narrowed. With a livid look, he got up from the desk and walked over to a hidden shelf. He grabbed a small medallion from the shelf and began to tap on it with his wand. Nothing happened. There was no spark, no glow, nothing. He tried several more times and when nothing happened, he threw it across the room. He headed towards the fireplace, grabbed some floo powder, and disappeared.

The office was quiet for a moment before a house-elf popped back in. She looked around and noticed that Dumbledore was indeed gone.

She went over to the desk, picked up the note that had been thrown to the floor, and rolled it back up. With a wary look around, she popped back out of the office.

She reappeared in another room and walked over to the figure sitting at the table. "I found the note. I took it like you told me too. The Headmaster was not happy."

The figure took the note and patted the house-elf on the arm. "Did he cause you any trouble?"

Twilly shook her head. "Oh no, the Headmaster was gone. Whatever it was that was in the note made him very angry."

The figure opened the note and began to read.

Dear Headmaster,

I hoped you liked my little tricks this morning. It was just a small way to show you how much I appreciate the care you have shown me over the years.

I wanted to let you know that I quit! I have resigned from the esteemed position of being your Potions Professor and the wonderful position as your spy.

I have found a way to rid myself of the secrecy and loyalty spells that you forced on me. Also, don't waste your time trying to find me as I am well hidden. I have also found a way to block the Dark Mark that you gave me. You can't hurt me anymore. I am no longer in your clutches; yours or Voldemort's.

Therefore, with great glee, I want to let you know to piss off. I hope this destroys your morning. Maybe, finally, something will take that annoying twinkle from your eyes, even if it is fake.

With no respect whatsoever,

Severus Snape

The figure laughed. "Oh, things are not going well for Dumbledore at all, are they?" the figure said, amused. The figure looked at the house-elf and smiled. "Go back home, Twilly. Your work here is finished. He knows your name now, so he might try to find you when he realizes the note is missing. I thank you for your hard work. It's good to know that Winky trusted you enough with this note in case she didn't come back last night."

Twilly smiled with pleasure then frowned and asked, "Do you know what happened to Winky?"

The figure frowned slightly then sighed before replying, "Whatever it was, I don't think it's good. I want you to send Calli to me. She will take your place."

"Very well. I'll see you later then," Twilly said.

The figure nodded. "Thank you, Twilly."

The house-elf disappeared and the figure tapped the table thoughtfully. With a smile, the figure moved towards the back room and entered it. After shutting the door and putting up a privacy spell, the figure ambled over to the fireplace and threw in some floo powder. "Lizzie," the figure called.

A moment later, Elizabeth Cameron's face appeared in the fire. "Ah, Vates, what news do you have for me?"

"Actually, I have several things to share with you, but first I have to tell you this," Vates said and proceeded to tell Lizzie about this morning events. Lizzie laughed hysterically and leaned against her desk to hold herself up.

"Oh Merlin, I would love to know who did that. I'm thinking a few words dropped at the Daily Prophet might be in order," she said with a grin.

Vates smiled gleefully and said, "I have a couple of pictures if you like. I had Twilly get the camera as soon as Dumbledore came into the Great Hall."

Lizzie laughed wickedly. "Excellent. Send them to Percy and he'll take care of it. Now, do you know who did it?"

Vates grinned at Lizzie. "I didn't at first, but apparently Winky gave Twilly a note last night to give to the Headmaster. I think she had a feeling something was going to happen to her."

Lizzie looked puzzled and Vates waved it aside. "I'll get into that later. As I was saying, Winky trusted Twilly with a note with specific instructions to give it to the Headmaster during breakfast. If things hadn't happened as they did, he would've read it during breakfast, where his reactions would have been seen by the whole school. I'd have loved to have seen his reaction, that's for sure."

"I had Twilly steal the note back from Dumbledore. Twilly said that Dumbledore was very angry after reading it. Once I read it, I could understand why. Apparently, Severus Snape was the um...perpetrator of this mornings drama," Vates informed her.

Lizzie looked shocked and asked, "Severus Snape? But I thought he was Dumbledore's lackey."

"According to the note, Severus Snape has slipped from his leash. Here let me read it to you." Vates read the note to Lizzie and watched as a look of shock and horror graced her face.

"Dumbledore gave him a Dark Mark?" she hissed. "And the secrecy and loyalty spell? Do we know which ones were used?"

Vates frowned. Thinking over the last few years, she nodded her head slowly. "Thinking back on his behavior, I'm thinking it was an old one. There are a couple of rare ones that don't work as expected. Some of Snape's behavior has been erratic when it came to Dumbledore and now I know why. I think he was trying to get around the spell. I wonder how he got rid of the spells and how he blocked the Dark Mark. I know of no way to do that."

Lizzie looked thoughtful. "Nor do I. Do you have any idea where he is now?"

"No. I know that Dumbledore said that he'd been called by Voldemort for the weekend, but I have a feeling that was just a cover from Snape," Vates explained.

"I agree. I would love to know where he has gone. I need to talk to him. I think with his help, we could be one step closer to getting Dumbledore," Lizzie said, her mind racing with ideas.

Vates sighed and looked at Lizzie. "Sadly, you know as well as I do that being an ex-Death Eater will not work in his favor. Majority of the Wizarding World and the Ministry will think it's a plan by Voldemort to discredit the Headmaster."

Lizzie growled. "Unfortunately." She heaved a large sigh, "So, anything else I should know about?"

Vates smiled grimly and said, "Sirius Black is alive."

Lizzie sat up in her chair, her expression stunned. "What?" she whispered hoarsely.

"It's true. I saw him last night. I was following Lupin as you told me to when I saw the house-elf Dobby, appear in the middle of the hallway. He dropped two bodies, one human and one was a house-elf, which I'm guessing was Winky. I got a good look at the human since his face was towards me and it was definitely Sirius. Lupin recognized him as well. I would've helped, but Dobby took the two bodies and disappeared, muttering something about it not being safe. Lupin was angry when they left. I can honestly say that the man was shocked, so I don't think he knew," Vates said.

Lizzie leaned back in her chair, staring absently. She chewed on her bottom lip. "I have a thought which I don't like. Could Dumbledore have imprisoned Sirius?"

Vates nodded. "It would make sense. Sirius was getting too close to Harry and he was having too much of an influence on him. Get rid of his last remaining family member and Harry would fold."

"Except he didn't, did he?" Lizzie said with a grim smile.

Vates smiled viciously. "Oh no, that little plan went awry. Instead of getting closer to Harry, it pushed him farther away. I told you that kid isn't as naïve as he's portrayed."

Lizzie grinned at Vates. "Yes, I'm beginning to see that. So if Dobby has Sirius then that means..." Lizzie trailed off.

"That Sirius is with Harry and Ron, which doesn't look good for the Headmaster," Vates said gleefully.

Lizzie laughed merrily. "Not at all, not at all. I want you to watch Lupin carefully. I have a feeling that Sirius may try to contact him."

Vates looked puzzled and asked, "You think he will? I would think that Sirius would want nothing to do with him after Harry and Ron gets finished telling him what's been going on lately."

Lizzie smirked at Vates and explained, "Oh yes, Sirius will be in contact with him if only to kill the man for hurting and betraying his godson. You know as well as I do that Sirius cares for Harry deeply. He's going to be very angry at Lupin."

"Very well," Vates said.

"Be sure to keep a close eye on Dumbledore. Things aren't going well for him and he is bound to lash out. I don't want you to be in way when it does."

"I understand. What about Granger?" she asked.

"I think its time to let some things be found out by the resident know it all. She is rather arrogant and narrow-minded, but she is brilliant. I think its time for her to find out what her beloved Headmaster has been up to. But be careful, as much as having her on our side would benefit us, she could just as easily go to Dumbledore with the information."

Vates frowned at Lizzie. "You know I don't agree with this, don't you? I think having Granger in on this is going to cause problems. You know as well as I do that Harry and Ron will not like it, if we can ever find them.

Lizzie sighed with resignation. "I know, but for right now go ahead with it. If it looks like she doesn't accept what she is given, then scrap it. I won't risk you, or even her on an off chance that it might work."

Vates groaned, annoyed. "Fine, but just so you know that I don't agree."

"Noted," Lizzie said. "Is there anything else that I should know about?"

"No, that's all I have for now. I'll let you know if I find anything else. Also, I'll have Calli with me instead of Twilly. Dumbledore knows her by name now and I don't want her to get hurt when he finds the note missing."

"All right, I have to go. Someone is knocking on my door. I'll talk to you later," Lizzie said and she disappeared from the fire.

Vates pulled back from the fireplace and cancelled the privacy spell. Sitting there for moment, lost in thought, Vates wondered idly what would happen now. Things were getting dicey when it came to Dumbledore, and Vates had a feeling that life would soon be interesting and dangerous. Vates sighed and stood up from the chair. Regardless of what was going to happen, things needed to be done now.

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Dumbledore stumbled out of the fireplace and looked around. Severus' rooms were bare. Everything that belonged to him was gone. He stalked around the room, trying to find any clue as to where he was, but he found nothing.

His blood boiled with rage as he realized that Severus had indeed slipped his leash. He tried calling him using the medallion that

controlled his Dark Mark, but nothing happened. How had he gotten around the spells? There was no way that he could've removed the spells himself, and there wasn't anyone powerful enough to remove them. So how in the hell did he cancel the spells, and how in the hell did the man block the Dark Mark? He knew that Severus still had it, or else the medallion would have been destroyed, so how was it blocked?

If he blocked Dumbledore's mark, then it was wise to assume that he also blocked Voldemort's Mark as well. The old wizard thought back to the note, maybe it would have some clues. He turned around and flooed back to his office. He stalked over to his desk and began to search for the note. He couldn't find it anywhere. He frowned thoughtfully. He could've sworn it fell to the floor when he left his office.

"Twilly," he called out and waited, but the house-elf didn't appear. "Twilly, attend me," he called one more time. With a snort of annoyance, he called out, "Mixy," and the house-elf appeared.

"Yes, Headmaster, sirs? How can Mixy help you?" the house-elf squeaked.

"Where is the house-elf, Twilly?" he asked kindly, but his eyes were hard and cold.

Mixy frowned thoughtfully and said, "Twilly sirs? There is no house-elf here by the name of Twilly."

The Headmaster looked at the house-elf, his expression irritated. "She brought me a letter earlier that was given to her by Winky. Now, tell me where is she?"

Mixy shook her head furiously and said, "Mixy is telling the Headmaster that there be no house-elf name Twilly in Hogwarts. There has never been a house-elf name Twilly in Hogwarts."

Dumbledore looked at her intently then growled. "Very well, you may go," he said coldly. He was lost in thought, not noticing the smug look

Mixy gave him before she disappeared. "What the hell is going on here?" he muttered.

He walked over to the window and looked out. His eyes were hard and his expression determined. "I think maybe it's time to implement a new plan. There has to be a way to destroy my enemies and gain the power that rightfully belongs to me. I will make everyone who defied me regret ever crossing me," he hissed. "I think its time for some research." With that, he whirled around and stalked out of his office. Things were about to get deadly.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Harry lay on the couch, exhausted from his lessons. He moved to get comfortable and groaned as his body began to ache. He knew that Severus was a perfectionist in potion making, but he didn't realize the man would be such a taskmaster in other things. He whimpered as he turned over on the couch. He looked over at Ron, who was lying on the floor, face slack from sleep. Ron had lain down on the floor after the lesson and immediately fell asleep.

Harry was startled out of his thoughts by a bottle appearing before his face. He looked up at a smirking Severus, who was holding a potion's bottle in his hand. "Here," Severus said with a grin. "I think you might need this."

Harry sat up with a groan, took the bottle, and opened it. He sniffed it and grimaced at the smell. "What is it?" he asked warily.

"It's a pain reliever plus an energy potion. You worked hard on your lessons and you're still recovering from Azkaban. I figured you might be a little sore," Severus said.

Harry looked over at Severus with an expression of disbelief. "A little sore?" he yelped. "Severus, I feel like my body has been trampled on by a herd of Centaurs, who then invited a herd of Hippogriffs to dance on my poor broken body. No, Severus, I'm not a little sore, I'm a lot sore!"

Severus snickered quietly before replying, "Drink the potion, Harry. You'll feel better if you do."

Harry grumbled a little, but obeyed the man. He swallowed the potion, grimacing slightly at the taste. He could feel the potion taking effect and sighed with relief as the throbbing in his body abated. He looked over at Severus and said, "Thanks. I feel better."

Harry handed the bottle back to Severus, who took and placed in the pocket of his robe. "You're welcome. I have a potion for Ron for when he wakes up. I'm assuming his body doesn't hurt as much since he's been more active than you."

Harry shrugged and said, "More than likely." The messy-haired young man sighed as his mind went back to the lesson Ron and he had just had.

After leaving Sirius's room, they had gone looking for a place to practice their lessons. They had eventually found a dueling room in the back of the castle. It was a very large round room with a dueling table in the middle. The room had several large mats lying on the floor and there were swords and staffs hanging on the wall. The walls were a dark blue with insets of golden griffins interspersed with dragons. All in all, it was a wonderful room.

Severus grunted with satisfaction and turned towards his students. "This room will do. I can feel the wards surrounding the room that makes it safe to do magic. Harry, I believe that we'll go over what you have already learned. You said your magic has increased since your magical inheritance so I'll need to know how much."

Harry nodded. "That's fine but you should know that Ron's magic has also increased since the Rites were done."

Severus looked over at Ron with surprise. "Is this true, Mr. Black?"

Ron shuffled nervously and looked at his former potions teacher. "Uh, yeah. I noticed an increase in my magic after I did the Emancipation Rite. After Harry and I did the Blood Rite, I noticed another increase in magic. That increase wasn't as significant as the one I got from the Emancipation Rite, but there was still an increase." Ron looked nervous a moment before saying, "Um...if you want, could you call me Ron? I'm not use to Black yet and every time I hear you say it I think you're talking to Sirius."

Severus gave him a sharp look before saying, "Very well, Ron, you may call me Severus."

Ron grinned at him and said, "Thanks, Uncle Severus."

Severus' eyes widened and Harry chuckled. "Oh, you didn't think that was a one time thing, did you?"

Severus glared, his expression annoyed. "Is this what I'm going to have to put up with while staying here in the castle?"

Harry looked at him with a serious look and nodded. "Yes," he said while Ron just smirked at him.

Severus sighed, shook his head, and began to walk across the room. "And for this I left the Headmaster and Voldemort's service. What was I thinking?" he moaned.

Ron and Harry snickered as they followed him across the room. Once they reached the mats, Severus turned around and looked at them. "Ron, you can sit this out if you want. This is just a refresher course for Harry."

Ron shook his head and replied, "No, I'll do some spells. Maybe I can see the difference in my magic that way."

Severus nodded his head and looked at Harry. "We will go over some of the spells that you learned before you were sent to Azkaban. Afterwards, I suggest you try to see if you can do the same spells using your wandless magic. Harry, it's important that you don't let anyone, except for those in this castle, know about your wandless magic. I want it to be a surprise. If either Dumbledore or Voldemort get a hold of your wand for any reason, I want them to be lulled into a false sense of security. They need to believe that you are defenseless. I want you to be able to give them a nasty surprise," Severus said with a feral smile.

Harry smiled at him coldly and said, "It would be my pleasure." He looked thoughtful a moment. "Actually, there is one other person who might need to know about my wandless magic," he informed Severus.

The Potions Master looked curious. "Who?"

"Tonks."

Severus looked surprised. "Nymphadora Tonks?" he asked and Harry nodded. "Why?"

"She told me that she quit the Order when she realized that Dumbledore wouldn't do anything to save me. She never believed that I killed those students and demanded that the Headmaster needed to save me. When he didn't, she quit the Order, unable to work for anyone who could just throw away someone like that. We met outside of Gringotts the other day and she told me that she would be able to help my with my Magical Sight, I think is what she called it. Apparently, she has it as well and told me that if I needed help developing it, then I could come to her," Harry explained.

"Ah, so that's what happened to her. I knew that she was no longer part of the Order, but Dumbledore never explained what had happened. He was a fool. He lost an important member of the Order. She could've been anyone, gone anywhere and the old bastard let her go. The stupidity of the man," Severus sighed. "Fine, if you decide to take Tonks up on her offer, then you may let her know about your wandless magic, if it comes up. If it doesn't, don't tell her."

Harry nodded with understanding. "All right."

Severus reached into his pocket and took out a couple of empty vials. Noticing Harry's curious look, he explained, "I'm a Potions Master. I always carry empty vials with me. You never know when you might need one."

"Ah," he murmured. It made sense to him. He watched at Severus transfigured the vials into a couple of feathers. The Potions Master laid them down on the floor and looked over at them. "I'm going to take you to the very beginning. I want you to cast Wingardium Leviosa just as you did in your first year. I want to see if there is an obvious change in your magic. I would love to have a magic meter to measure your power, but since I don't have one, this will have to do."

"Ron, you're first," Severus said.

Ron stepped forward and looked at Severus nervously. He pulled out his wand and aimed it towards the feather. "Wingardium Leviosa," he called out and watched as the feather flew into the air. It stopped and floated in the air. Ron looked at it in amazement.

"Ron, did you feel any difference when you did the spell?" Severus asked.

The redhead nodded. "Yeah. Usually when I do the spell, the item I'm levitating lifts slowly into the air. This time the feather just shot up into the air. It's also easier for me to do the spell. I felt like I barely had to call out the spell."

Severus looked pensive for a moment before nodding. "Very well. Cancel the spell and let Harry have a turn."

Ron muttered, "Finite," and the feather fell to the ground. Ron turned towards Harry and nodded at him. Harry took a step forward and pulled out his wand. He aimed it towards the feather and called out, "Wingardium Leviosa." He watched, stunned, as the feather flew into the air and slammed into the ceiling. Dust from the cracked plaster fell onto the ground and Harry looked at Severus, blinking rapidly. "Er...sorry?"

Ron laughed. "Oh, I think there's a definite increase in Harry's magic."

Harry looked up at the ceiling and shook his head. "Huh. I knew I had gained some more magic, but wow," he said, dazed.

Severus walked over to him, placed his hand on Harry's shoulder, and squeezed gently. "If you can do this much damage with just a first year spell and a feather, then you know what that means," he commented.

"Uh...he could kick Voldemort and Dumbledore's ass?" Ron said humorously.

Severus gave Ron a stern look and the redhead shut up. He turned back to Harry and replied, "While it's true you have more magic, you don't have the control. Dumbledore could come in here right now and defeat you simply on that one fact. Dumbledore and Voldemort both have had years to learn to control their magic. You, on the other hand, haven't. You could lose control of your magic and drain yourself. It's imperative that you learn to control your power. Simply put, you will

have to relearn everything you have ever learned. From the simplest spell to the hardest, you must learn control or else you will lose."

Harry groaned. "Great. I thought I'd be learning more spells, not going over ones I already know."

Severus glared at him, his expression annoyed. "Harry, I understand that you want to learn, but first you must have control over your magic. Once you learn to control your magic, it will be easier for you to do harder spells. Remember, you could do the Expecto Patronum spell when you were a third year student, and that was before your magical inheritance. You had control over your magic then, so it made it easier to learn," Severus said.

Harry chewed on his bottom lip and nodded in understanding. "So, if I learn to control my magic..."

"Then you will have the ability to make any spell either very powerful or very weak. You will be able to determine just how much power goes into your spells. You will control your magic instead of your magic controlling you. You have a lot of raw power, now you just need to learn how to harness it," Severus explained.

"I understand. So, it looks like I get to learn all over again. Oh the joy," Harry trilled in a falsetto voice.

Ron snickered as Severus rolled his eyes. The Potions Master turned towards Ron and said, "You can use this time to learn more control as well. Your magic has also gotten stronger. It may not be as strong as Harry's, but there's a definite increase over what you had. You need to learn to control your magic as well."

Ron sighed and looked at Harry with resignation. "It looks like we're first years again," he said mournfully.

Harry nodded and grimaced before replying, "Let's hope there's no troll this time around."

Ron laughed as Severus groaned in remembrance. Ron pause mid-laughter and looked at Harry. "If you had a chance to do it all over again, would you still save Hermione?" he asked softly.

Harry looked over at his brother and saw the pain in his eyes. "Yeah, I would still save Hermione. Only this time I don't think I would be friends with her or maybe I would. I don't know. Her betrayal hurts, Ron," Harry said. "I just don't understand how she could throw away years of friendship in an instant. We all went through a lot together. I always thought we would always be friends. Why was she so eager to betray me? I could understand if she had done it after the trial, hell I would've expected it, but she was the first to turn on me. I thought she knew me better than that," he whispered as he gazed at Ron.

Ron took a step forward, placed his hand on Harry's arm, and squeezed gently. "I don't know what Hermione's reason is for betraying you and I don't really care. I just know that if she'd been a real friend, to the both of us, then she wouldn't have done it. Don't think about her any longer. She's not worth the pain," he said firmly.

Harry smiled at Ron gratefully. The redhead lifted his hand off Harry's arm and grinned at him. "Look at it this way, you may have lost a friend, but you gained a brother. That's gotta be worth something," Ron quipped brightly.

Harry smiled at him, his face beaming with joy. "You know, you're right. It is worth something. I have you, Dobby, Sirius and now Severus. So, yeah, it's worth it."

Severus cleared his throat to gain their attention. "As much fun," he said with a grimace, "as this is, can we get back to what we were doing?"

Ron and Harry looked at each other and smirked. They looked at Severus with innocent and attentive faces. "Yes, Uncle Severus," they chorused together.

Severus crossed his arms and looked at them with disapproval. They smiled and Severus glared. Their smiles got even wider and Severus glared harder. They kept up the silent war before Harry lost it and

started to giggle. Severus and Ron looked at him in bemusement before Ron turned towards Severus and shook his head sadly. "Azkaban made him lose his ever lovin mind," Ron said.

Severus snorted, amused, and watched as Harry calmed down. "Now that you're done with your infantile humor, may we proceed?" he asked caustically.

Harry wiped the tears off his face and nodded at the Potions Master. "Sure, Severus, I'm done. Please, oh masterly one, teach us so that we may learn," he intoned and broke down into giggles again.

Ron shook his head with mock sadness. "It's so sad when they finally go crazy."

Severus sighed and rubbed his finger across his forehead. He took out his wand and pointed it at Harry. "Hama ab Aqua," he said softly and a bucket of water appeared over Harry's head. The messy-haired young man cried out in shock as the bucket tipped over and spilled the water all over him. Ron burst into laughter and Severus stood there with a smug expression on his face. "Now, Mr. Potter, if you're finished, shall we proceed?"

Harry pouted a moment, then with a smirk, he waved his hand and the water disappeared and he was dry. "Sure, I'm ready," he said smugly.

Severus rolled his eyes at Harry and grunted with annoyance. "Very good Mr. Potter, I'm impressed," he said sarcastically. "Wands out!" he snapped and the two young men had their wands in their hands before they realized what was going on.

Severus smirked at their action, pleased that he still had it. "Now then, let's start with the feather again. Harry, this time less power in the spell, please."

Harry had thought the lessons were going to be easy. He figured that he would show Severus that he knew all the first year spells and they could move on. Sadly, that's not how it went. After he finally got control of the Wingardium Leviosa spell, Severus started him on other

spells. It quickly became apparent that Harry didn't even have the control of a first year student. After several hours of trying to control his magic and to control the level of power that went into each spell, he was exhausted. Severus was a very hard taskmaster, but Harry could honestly say that he had made some good progress. Harry had been so tired and his body sore from the lessons that they hadn't even touched the subject of him using the wandless magic yet. He dreaded tomorrow's lesson.

Severus walked over to Ron and squatted down. He shook the redhead and watched as Ron snorted and turned over. Harry chuckled. "You're going to have a hard time getting him up. He's a deep sleeper."

"I could always pour a glass of water over his face," Severus said slyly.

Harry smirked. "True, but I have a better way." He got up and walked over to his sleeping friend. He squatted down next to Severus and cleared his throat. "RONALD BILIUS WEASLEY! WAKE UP RIGHT NOW!" Harry yelled and watched as his friend sat up and looked around wildly. "I'm up, mum!"

Harry and Severus chuckled as Ron glanced around the room. His eyes landed on them and he groaned aloud. "You know, you won't be able to do that for very much longer. I'm no longer a Weasley, and eventually I'll realize that."

"True, but I'll use it until it stops working," Harry said cheerfully. "Be glad I did it this way instead of going with Severus' idea."

Ron looked at Severus warily and asked, "What idea?"

"A glass of water poured on your face," Severus said with a straight face.

Ron gaped at him. "That's mean!"

Severus arched an eyebrow and asked, "You're point would be?"

Harry grinned at his friend. "Better get up, Ron. You need to get to the Ministry to see if you can get a hold of Percy. Severus here has a nice potion for you if you're hurting."

Ron looked at Severus eagerly and waited as the man took the potion vial out of his robe pocket. The redhead quickly grabbed it, opened it, and swallowed the potion. He sighed with relief as the ache in his body disappeared. He handed Severus the empty vial and got up from the floor. "Is it lunch time yet? I'm starving," he stated.

"Yes, I think it is. Why don't you have Sage get you some lunch? I'm going to go visit with Sirius. There are a couple of questions I've been meaning to ask him," Harry said.

Ron looked at him curiously. "Oh, like what?"

"Did Sirius go through the veil and if he did, where did he wind up? If he didn't, then who in the hell went through the veil? Was Sirius even at the Ministry that night?"

"You know I would like to hear the answer to those questions myself," Severus said. "Do you mind if I join you?"

Harry shook his head. "No, that's fine. In fact, why don't we all have lunch with Sirius. I'm sure he wouldn't mind. He's probably bored out of his mind."

"Well, if everyone else is going up to Sirius's room, then I might as well just eat my lunch there," Ron said.

The three men walked out of the room and made their way up to Sirius's room. They could hear voices coming from his room as they got closer.

"Damn it, Dobby! Why can't I at least go outside? I'm bored out of freaking mind here. I feel fine!" Sirius said, aggravated.

"NO! Mutt cannot go outside. Mutt has to stay in bed and get some rest. Don't make Dobby smack you!" Dobby said sternly.

Harry shook with silent laughter at the argument. Dobby was taking his protection of Sirius very seriously. His godfather had yet to learn that you don't piss off a free house-elf. They walked up to the door and Harry knocked.

"Come in," Dobby called.

Harry opened the door and entered the room. "Hey, Dobby. Hey, Padfoot. I thought you might like it if we came up here for lunch. I had some questions that I needed to ask you, and Severus was curious about the answers so he came with me. Ron just wanted lunch," Harry explained as he walked over to the bed.

Sirius's face had brightened when the three men came walking into the room. "Harry! Prongslet! Celevon! Whatever the hell you're calling yourself right now, come in and help me! This house-elf," Sirius spat, annoyed, "won't let me do a damn thing. Maybe you can talk him into letting me get out of this bed."

Harry shook his head vigorously. "Oh, hell no. Sorry, Padfoot, I love you and I would do anything for you, but I'm afraid getting Dobby to change his mind isn't one of them. He is very determined to watch over you, and he's a very stubborn and powerful house-elf. Sorry, Sirius, but on this, you're on your own."

Sirius crossed his arms and pouted at Harry. He sniffed mournfully and looked at Harry with large puppy dog eyes. The messy-haired young man shook his head and chuckled. "Sorry, Sirius, I really can't help you."

Sirius groaned as Dobby looked at him and smirked. "Dobby will be getting your lunch now," he said and popped out of the room.

"Why me?" Sirius sighed.

Harry cracked up and sat down on the bed. "Don't worry Padfoot, you'll be out of here tomorrow, and you can go get your wand. Then you can help Severus torture Ron and I all you want."

Sirius's face brightened at that. "So, how were your lessons?"

Harry and Ron moaned in remembrance as Severus stood there with a smirk on his face. "Ron's magic increased when he did both Rites. He had to learn some control over his magic, which he did quite easily. Harry, on the other hand, needs some more help," Severus explained.

Sirius looked at them, perplexed. "Why?"

"With his magical inheritance, he received a very significant magical increase. He needs to learn control all over again," Severus informed him and explained what had happened when Harry had performed Wingardium Leviosa on the feather.

Sirius looked at his godson with amazement. "Well, that's interesting. So basically you need to relearn everything again?"

Harry nodded. "I've finally got control over the first year spells. Now, I have to start on the second year spells. I thought Severus had been kidding, but after the first several times I had cast a spell, I felt drained. I was putting too much power into the spell and I couldn't control it. It's better now, but I still need some help."

Sirius looked at him with a seriously. "Then help is what you'll get. With my help and Snape's help, we should get you in tiptop shape. But Harry, you'll need to listen to us carefully. We do know what we're talking about. We're not going to treat you like a child, so when we tell you to do something, there's a reason for it. Even if you don't agree with it at the time," Sirius said.

Harry sighed with resignation. "All right."

"Good. Now, let's have some lunch and you can ask all the questions that you need to," Sirius said cheerfully. He looked over at Snape, rolled his eyes, and said, "Well, sit down, grease boy."

Severus sneered mildly and sat down in the chair next to the bed. Harry looked at Sirius, astounded. His godfather noticed the look and arched an eyebrow. "What?" he asked, baffled.

"You're being relatively nice to Severus. Why?" Harry asked.

Sirius smiled grimly at Harry. "I've come to realize that there were a lot of things the Headmaster was to be blamed for. Did you know that Snape, James, Remus, Peter, and I were friends at one time?"

Harry looked between Severs and Sirius, an amazed expression on his face. "No. I know that Snape hated you, Remus and my dad. The thought that you might've been friends, is well, weird."

Sirius chuckled. "When we were first years, we hung out together. We had several classes together and James and I realized that Snape wasn't such a bad guy for a Slytherin. For that whole year, we hung out and we were friends. The second year, when we went back to school, things began to change. Rumors were started about Slytherin being evil and the fights between the Marauders and Snape started. Snape had begun to act strange, ignoring us, calling us names, and treating us like dirt. Instead of finding out what was going on, we decided that Snape was no longer our friend. Finally, about six months into the school year, James was attacked and beaten up pretty severely. He'd always claimed that it was Snape who had done it, but no one would believe him as Snape had an alibi. From then on we were enemies," Sirius explained.

"I never attacked James," Severus snapped.

Sirius looked at him, his expression grave. "No, I know that now. I've had almost three years to think about things. Once you know all the players and their positions in the game, things become much clearer. To the Marauders, Dumbledore was the embodiment of the perfect Gryffindor. He could do no wrong. Imagine what would've happened if the students began to see that the Slytherin weren't as bad as they were made out to be. What if the Slytherins and Gryffindors became friends? What if we had united together and defeated Voldemort the first time around? Who wouldn't benefit from that? Think about it, using what you know now."

Severus looked at him, baffled, before his eyes widened with disbelief. "Dumbledore would've lost out."

"Huh?" Harry asked, confused. "How would've he lost out? Wouldn't he have still been in the position of power that he was in before?"

"Yes, but if the Slytherins and Gryffindors worked together in the war, then who would be our enemy once Voldemort was defeated? We wouldn't have needed a hero anymore. Dumbledore's standing would've crumbled. We learn from a very early age that all Slytherins are evil. Why is that? We're told that all Dark wizards come from Slytherin.

Why? We know it's not true, especially with Peter's betrayal. Also, Grindelwald wasn't a Slytherin, he was a Ravenclaw. I thought about it and I've come to realize that the rumors that Slytherin are evil became more prominent over the last 100 years. Who do we know that's still around who would benefit from that rumor?" Sirius asked.

"Dumbledore," Severus growled heatedly.

Sirius nodded. "I think that Dumbledore began to spread those rumors during our second year at Hogwarts. Then you began to act strange, and to us Marauders, that was suspicious behavior. With Dumbledore subtly encouraging us, we became enemies."

Severus sat back in his chair with a sigh and shook his head. "All these years," he moaned softly. "My father got a letter at the end of my first year, letting him that I had become friends with several Gryffindors," Severus explained. "He beat me and then threatened me with death if I didn't discontinue our friendship. When I asked who had sent him the letter, he told me that it was an anonymous person who was worried about the integrity of the Slytherin name. He never did find out who it was that sent him the letter, not that he cared."

"Looking at it now though, it was probably Dumbledore who sent him the letter. He needed a way to discourage me from being your friends. He knew what kind of father I had and that I feared the man. When I got back to school, I had to ignore you. I was being watched by several of the Slytherins. They would've reported back to my father if I was seen with you. I had hoped to get you four alone, but I never had the opportunity. Then the rumors started and the Marauders

began to act strange. When James was attacked and the four of you blamed me, I knew then that our friendship was over."

Sirius looked at him sadly. "We were only twelve years old. How would we know that it was all because of one man? All we knew was that our friend no longer wanted to be our friend and then he attacked James. It was enough to break the friendship. We never even bothered checking anything out to see if it was true. I think Dumbledore had someone use a polyjuice potion to appear as you then beat James up, hell it might've even been him. It's not beyond the realm of possibility. Regardless, it effectively destroyed our friendship and any peace the Slytherin and Gryffindors might've had was destroyed as well. He kept that bitterness and rivalry going throughout our school years. Whenever it looked like we might forgive and forget, something always happened," he said.

"Then came the night that I sent you after Remus. I sent you after him for no reason than stupid rumors again. When Dumbledore covered it up and I got off with nothing more than a slap on the hand, you must've hated us even more," Sirius murmured.

Severus looked at him and nodded. "It also effectively drove me to Voldemort. Whatever hopes I had that Dumbledore would help a Slytherin was destroyed in that moment and I went to the one person who had promised me power; power that I would use to rid myself of the Marauders and Dumbledore. I was so very foolish," the Potions Master told him grimly.

"You were still a child, Snape," Sirius sighed. "We all were. We were part of the machinations of an evil old man. We couldn't have known. The majority of the Wizarding World believes that Dumbledore is a savior, a kind, benevolent grandfather of the Wizarding World. They can't know what he's truly like. All I can say is that I'm sorry, Severus. I'm sorry for not knowing, sorry for allowing my stupidity to hurt you," Sirius apologized remorsefully.

Severus looked at him for several moments before nodding. "I'll accept yours if you accept mine. I'm not a kind man, Black, and I doubt that I'll change. Too many things have happened over the years, but I think its time that we had a truce. We need to be together

in bringing down Dumbledore and Voldemort. We can't be having hostilities in our own group. We need to stick together if we're ever going to accomplish that."

"I accept your apology as well," Sirius said.

Harry beamed at the both of them. "We're just all one big happy family, aren't we?" he asked happily.

Sirius glanced at Snape who rolled his eyes. Sirius snickered and looked at Harry. "You, my godson, are way too happy."

Dobby had appeared in the middle of Sirius and Severus's talk. Ron was already eating and Dobby was getting a plate together for Sirius. He jumped up on the bed and laid the plate on the animagus's lap. He gave Sirius a stern look. "Be sure to eat all that."

He hopped off the bed, made another plate, and walked over to Severus. "Here you go, Professor."

Severus thanked the house-elf and began to eat. He watched as Harry got up and walked over to the table, sitting next to Ron. He began eating and talking quietly to Ron.

Sirius looked over at Severus with a serious expression and asked quietly, "Just how powerful is he?"

Severus glanced over at Harry, looking pensive. "He is very powerful. If I had to estimate, I would say that he might be as powerful as Merlin himself. You know as well as I do that no one can do magic in Azkaban. For him to be able to do that, he has to have tremendous power. I wish I had a magic meter that could measure his power, but I'm pretty sure that he's more powerful than Dumbledore. He just doesn't have the control. He would be drained in a duel between either Dumbledore or Voldemort. He needs a lot of work. I'm just afraid that we may not have the time to do it," Severus said with a worried look on his face. "I'm not sure what Dumbledore has planned next, but we've been incredibly lucky so far. I just have a feeling that the luck is about to run out."

Sirius nodded in understanding and looked over at his godson and the boy he would call his nephew. "I would die to protect them both. We can't let Dumbledore or Voldemort get their grubby little hands on them," Sirius said adamantly.

"I agree. We shall teach them all that we know. I also have access to a library that Harry might find useful. After he's done with his lessons, I think I should take him there. There are books there that haven't seen the light of day for hundreds of years. There are bound to be spells in there that have been long forgotten," Severus mused thoughtfully.

"Library?" Sirius asked, curiously.

Severus glanced over at Sirius and smiled slyly. "Let's just say that the Snapes are very fond of knowledge. A lot of the knowledge in that library has been forgotten."

"And I assume that no one knows about it?" Sirius smirked.

"It's been well hidden for over a thousand years," Severus replied smugly.

"Why doesn't Voldemort know about the library?" Sirius asked.

Severus snorted with contempt and said, "Not all Snapes know about the library. It's been passed from one family member to another. Only those with a thirst for knowledge are allowed to have the key. My father could've cared less about learning. He just wanted money and power. My grandmother refused to give him the key, so instead she gave it to my mother. My mother was a wonderful woman who had been forced into a marriage with a man she didn't love."

"Her love of knowledge rivaled even Miss Granger. When she became sick and realized she would be dying, she gave me the key. She knew of my love for potions and she knew that there were books that contained lost potion recipes. She had a feeling that I would enjoy learning about them. I visited the library several times after she died, but then I was initiated into Voldemort's service and I no longer visited the library. I was afraid of being watched, and I didn't want

Voldemort to be suspicious of my activities. After I left Voldemort's service, I went to Dumbledore and realized the sort of man he really was. I knew then that there was no way in hell that the man was getting anywhere near my family library," Severus elucidated coldly.

"When Harry rescued me, I took the key and figured that I would let him have it. I doubt I will ever have children and I'm not even sure that I'll survive the war, so I want someone to have the key so that the knowledge won't be lost."

"Harry has a thirst for knowledge?" Sirius asked, puzzled.

Severus chuckled. "Oh, yes, he does. He may've pretended to be a slacker in front of the school and Dumbledore, but one night I found Harry avidly reading books that he had taken from the library. He always read in a deserted classroom in the dungeon. I would check up on him periodically to see how he was getting along. He was always reading different books. He may not have had classes the last nineteen months, but trust me that boy already knows the spells he was supposed to learn. He had a very Slytherin approach to his education. He was hiding his true talent and letting everyone believe that he was a mediocre student at best. I must say that I was quite proud of his Slytherin tactics. I never told anyone, not even the Headmaster."

"So, if he knows all the spells he was supposed to learn, then what are we teaching him?" Sirius asked.

"He may know the spells, but he can't use him. His power is too great. He has to learn control first, before he can even be able to use a single spell he learned. Plus, he needs to learn more than what Hogwarts teaches. I have a feeling that many reasons Hogwarts curriculum is so mediocre is because of the Headmaster. I looked over some lesson plans from classes a hundred and fifty years ago, and they were teaching spells in school that the Aurors learn now. I think the Headmaster changed it so that no one could gain the knowledge to defeat him," Severus told him.

The animagus sighed. "There is just so much that the Headmaster has to answer for. You know, in some ways, it's almost a good thing

that Harry was in Azkaban and out of the Headmaster's way. I'm afraid of what he would've done if he had been around when Harry gained his magical inheritance. Harry has so much to learn," he moaned.

Severus smirked. "Yes, but he's intelligent enough to do it. If he can fool the Headmaster for years, then I don't think he'll have a problem."

Sirius chuckled and looked over at Harry. "Why that sly dog," he said with pride.

Severus snorted. "No, that would be you."

Sirius groaned at the bad pun. "Hey, what do you mean that Harry rescued you?" he asked suddenly.

Harry over heard Sirius's question and growled angrily at the thought of what Dumbledore had done to Severus. The glass in the room began to shake and there was a low humming throughout the room. Harry's hair began to move and there was a soft breeze blowing around the room.

Severus looked at Harry, alarmed. "Harry, you need to calm down. Your magic is taking control of you. Rein it in Harry, now!"

Harry took a couple of deep breaths and tried to calm down. The glass stopped shaking, the humming disappeared, and the soft breeze vanished. Harry took a couple more deep breaths and looked over at Severus and Sirius with a sheepish expression. "Sorry about that. Just remembering what Dumbledore did to Severus pisses me off," he explained.

"Ah, yeah, I can see that," Sirius said, bewildered. "Could someone explain to me what happened to Snape, please?"

Severus sighed deeply and began to explain. As he told Sirius how Dumbledore had basically made him into his slave, Sirius expression darkened with fury. By the time Severus has finished his explanation,

Sirius was livid. He sat a moment and the room was quiet. "You do realize that the Headmaster has to die don't you?" he asked coldly.

Harry and Ron looked at him, shocked while Severus nodded. "What do you mean, Padfoot?" Harry asked cautiously.

"If the man is evil enough to imprison one man, turn another into a slave, attempt to kill someone, and lie all his life for power, then what will he do if Harry defeats him and lets him live?" Sirius asked. "You know as well as I do that he won't allow you to take his power away from him. He'll have to die or be drained of his magic so that he can no longer be a threat. We can't allow him to become another Dark Lord," Sirius declared.

Harry leaned back in his chair and said, "That means that Voldemort will have to be the first one to die. If we went after Dumbledore now, he might chuck his good guy image, destroy Voldemort and take over. While Voldemort is powerful, he is afraid of one person, Dumbledore. As far as I know, Dumbledore is afraid of no one. There wouldn't be anyone to keep him in check while I learn what I need to know. Does anyone truly know how powerful Dumbledore is?"

"We know that Dumbledore is powerful, but we're not sure just how powerful. He could very well be hiding his magic or he could be exaggerating his magic. One can never be too sure," Severus said. "We have to find a way to keep him in check. We simply don't have the resources to be fighting two Dark Lords.

Ron piped up, "I would go with the assumption that Dumbledore is just as strong as Harry if not more. If he isn't then great, but if he is, at least we won't get a surprise."

"That's a very good idea, Ron," Severus said and Ron blushed.

They finished lunch and sat around talking. Harry was sipping his tea when he finally decided it was time to ask Sirius the questions he had thought of earlier.

"Padfoot, were you with us at the Ministry the night you supposedly died?" Harry asked.

Sirius looked at him, surprised, and shook his head. "No, I was getting ready to go to the Ministry when I was hit on the back of the head by something and it knocked me unconscious. When I awoke, I was in Dumbledore's manor, wondering what the hell was going on. Later that night, he came by and told me that everyone thought that I had died by falling into the Veil and that I was a prisoner in order to keep you in line. Apparently, Kreacher informed Dumbledore of my intentions to go to the Ministry," he explained.

"Kreacher?" Harry hissed.

"Yes, apparently Dumbledore forced a bond on Kreacher and he reported everything I did to Dumbledore. Merlin knows if I ever find that little elf, I'll kill."

"Too late," Ron informed him cheerfully. "Lupin transformed one night and escaped from the basement. He found Kreacher and proceeded to rip him apart. Couldn't happen to a better house-elf, no offense, Dobby," he said to the house-elf.

Dobby smirked. "I'm not offended. I happen to agree."

"So, do we know who it was that went through the Veil?" Harry asked.

"Dumbledore didn't say who it was, but it wasn't anyone important. Well, at least to him. He told me that the man was under the Imperious curse," Sirius replied.

"Is there anyone from the Order that went missing around that time?" Harry asked Severus.

Severus gaze was distant as he went through the missing Order members. He shook his head and said, "No, there was no one missing at that time. There was however a missing Death Eater. No one could explain how he had disappeared. He wasn't anyone of any significance, but it was unusual."

"Who?" Harry asked.

"Marcus Flint. His father was quite upset with his disappearance. He had plans for the boy," Severus explained.

Harry remembered the cruel and sadistic Slytherin. The feud between Marcus Flint and Oliver Wood was right up there with the feud between him and Draco Malfoy. "It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy," Harry said sarcastically.

Severus grunted in agreement. "Yes, he was a rather vicious Slytherin, wasn't he? I must say that I was glad to see him graduate. He really gave Slytherins a bad name," he said with an indignant sniff. Harry, Ron, and Sirius grinned at his tone.

Ron stood up and stretched before looking at Harry. "Well, I've had my lunch. I think it's time that I go find Percy. I need to see if he knows anything," he said, his face blank.

Harry looked at him carefully and asked, "Are you sure? Do you want me to go with you?"

Ron shook his head and replied, "No, I'll be fine. He probably won't even talk to me. I'm no longer his brother, but I'm still your friend. You know that you were a big part of the reason he left the family."

"Or so he says," Harry said and Ron nodded.

"I guess I should go find out then, eh? I need to get ready. I'll talk to you later," he said and walked out of the room.

Harry watched him leave, concerned at how hard this would be for his friend. He hoped things went well for Ron. Harry couldn't understand how Ron didn't consider the Weasleys his family anymore. Harry thought that it was impossible that eighteen years of love could disappear in a few months. Whatever else Ron may be feeling for his former family, he knew that somewhere, deep down inside, he still loved his former family. He hoped that maybe Percy could be the exception to the rule. Whether Ron wanted to admit it or not, he still needed his family. Harry just hoped that Ron would never regret going through the Emancipation Rite. Harry knew it couldn't be done a second time.

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Hama ab Aqua – Loosely translated Latin – Bucket of Water

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Ron walked into the Ministry building and glanced around. He had made sure that his glamour was on before he even entered the phone booth that led to the Ministry building. He was leery about the spies for Dumbledore that he knew were in the Ministry. As he made his way to Percy's office, he was worried about meeting his former brother. He had hopes that maybe they could become friends even if they weren't brothers anymore.

He stood outside Percy's office and shifted nervously. He raised his hand to knock then lowered it. What if Percy kicked him out? What if he didn't want to hear what Ron had to say? Did he truly dislike his family or was it something more? Did he even have a chance? Deciding that he couldn't answer those questions standing outside Percy's office, he took a deep breath, raised his hand, and knocked on the door.

"Enter," an imperious voice called out.

Ron opened the door, walked in and took his first look at Percy in several years. Percy looked good. He grew up several more inches and his hair was longer. He filled out some and it looked like he worked out. Percy looked up and glared at him, annoyed. "Can I help you?" he asked, his voice strident.

"Ah, yes, my name is Bernard Rigel and I have some information that I need to discuss with you," Ron said.

Percy looked at him with narrowed eyes. "May I ask what this is regarding? I'm sure the Minister would be interested in whatever you know," he stated pompously.

Ron stared at him a moment before sneering. "Your pathetic Minister has nothing to do with this. It's regarding a certain missing hero and his friend. If you're interested in the information then meet me at Leaky Cauldron in one hour. I'll be waiting for you," Ron said and walked out of the room. He hurried down the hall, ignoring Percy's yelled, "WAIT!" Ron found a deserted room, pulled out his wand, and quickly changed his glamour before waiting a few minutes before

leaving the room. He was walking towards the doors of the Ministry building when he saw a flustered Percy stalking through the foyer. There was a frown on his face and seemed to be muttering to himself. Ron grinned, walked out of the building and headed towards the Leaky Cauldron. Once he arrived, he rented a room and grabbed a drink. He gave Tom a note to give to Percy when he arrived and sat in the darkened corner to wait for him.

An hour later, Percy walked into the inn and look around, his gaze a little anxious. He walked over to Tom and started a conversation. Tom gave Percy the note and Percy nodded his thanks. He opened the note and read it. There was frown on his face and he walked up to the room that Ron rented. Ron waited fifteen minutes and noticed that a couple of Ministry workers walked in. He could tell by the way they sat that they were waiting for something. Ron frowned thoughtfully and sighed. He'd hoped that he wouldn't have to use on of the portkeys that he'd asked Severus make before he left. He got up casually and walked up the stairs. He waited at the top, but didn't hear anyone following him. He opened the door to room 210 and walked in.

Percy was sitting at the table, looking furious. He looked up when Ron came walking in and his face filled with confusion. "I'm sorry, but I thought I was meeting with Bernard Rigel," he said.

Ron ignored him and walked over to Percy. He reached down, grabbed his arm, and pulled him out of the chair. "Sorry that I have to do this, Perce," he informed his former brother. He pulled the empty potions vial out of his robe pocket and activated the portkey just as the door to the room slammed open. Ron and Percy disappeared and the two Ministry workers cursed angrily.

They reappeared in the living room of an apartment flat. Percy stumbled back and quickly drew out his wand. He pointed it at Ron, his expression angry. "I want to know what the hell is going on?" he demanded.

Ron snorted, annoyed, and ignored his brother while he looked around the apartment, whistling with amazement. It was one of the penthouses the belonged to Harry. The living room was nice and

large. The large windows showed a wonderful scene of the ocean. Ron could see the antiques that were scattered throughout the apartment. He would have to recommend it to Harry if he needed another place to stay.

"Damn it, I asked you a question. What the hell is going on? Why did you portkey me out of the Leaky Cauldron?" Percy asked.

Ron turned towards Percy and smirked. "I didn't want to be interrupted by the two Ministry workers that had followed you into the Leaky Cauldron," he replied.

Percy's eyes widened, shocked, and blurted out, "How did you know about them?"

Ron rolled his eyes and asked, "You don't think I made you wait in that room just for the fun of it, did you?"

Percy frowned thoughtfully. "No, I guess you didn't. Now could you explain to me what the hell is going on? Who are you? Where is Bernard Rigel? What information does he have on Harry and my brother? Do you know where they are? Are they ok? Are they hurt? Do you have anything to do with it? Because if you did, then I'm going to make you pay," Percy said with a growl and pointed his wand at Ron.

Ron stared at him a moment, surprised by the fear and anger he heard in Percy's voice. "I'm Bernard Rigel. Have you ever heard of glamours? I heard you were smart, but I guess I heard wrong," Ron said contemptuously. He was amused as Percy's face filled with outrage.

"I thought you hated Harry? It's well known that's why you left your family. Your hatred for Dumbledore and Harry, and your pathetic hero-worship for that idiot Fudge," Ron sneered.

"I don't have to explain myself to you. Now, where is my brother?" Percy demanded.

"You know as well as I do that he's no longer your brother. Something about a Rite being done," Ron said slyly.

Percy's eyes widened before narrowing with anger. "How did you know about that?" he demanded. "No one knows about that yet."

"I have my ways. Why concern yourself over a man who isn't even family anymore?" Ron asked.

Percy's eyes grew cold. "Ron may have gone through the Rite, but he is still my brother by blood. No Rite is ever going to change that!" he growled.

"This from the man who deserted his 'family'?" Ron sneered.

"I had my reasons," Percy said defensively.

"Ah, yes, you wanted to ride the coat tails of the esteemed Minister of Magic. Answer me this Percy, how far has it gotten you? Was it worth deserting your family over?" Ron asked angrily.

Percy took a step back and stared at him intently. He lowered his wand and whispered, "Ron?"

Ron took his wand out and cancelled the glamour. "Hello, Percy," he said quietly.

"Ronnie!" Percy cried with excitement and rushed over to him. Ron was stunned when Percy pulled him into a hard hug. He wrapped his arms around Percy and held on. Ron hadn't expected this reaction from Percy. Tears pricked his eyes and he sniffed as he took a step back.

Percy looked at him, concerned, and asked, "What? What's wrong?"

"It's been a while since anyone but Harry felt any concern for me," Ron said softly.

Percy's face darkened with anger at the comment. "So I heard. If I had known that the family would treat you as they did, I would've

came for you sooner. I'm sorry for not being there for you, Ron. I just didn't know," Percy said softly.

Ron turned away from Percy and said, "Well, you would've if you'd stayed with your family, but Merlin forbid if you did that. Is being a sycophant of Fudge really worth it, Percy? Is he worth losing your family over? I had reasons to leave my family, but what was yours? Was it because a man who can't even see beyond his own power and greed said that Dumbledore and Harry were wrong about Voldemort?" Ron whirled around and glared at Percy. "Was it truly worth it?" he yelled.

Percy looked at Ron sadly and said, "There's more to it than that, Ron. Not everything is as it appears. I had my reasons for separating myself from the family. There's more to it than just Fudge."

"What could be so damn important that you deserted your family, Percy?" Ron asked angrily.

"Finding out that Dumbledore isn't the man everyone thinks he is, but then you know that already, don't you, Ron?" Percy asked quietly.

Ron stared at Percy in shock and whispered, "You know about Dumbledore?"

Percy nodded his head and replied, "Yes, I know about Dumbledore."

"But how? For how long? Why isn't anything being done?" Ron asked him. "Do you know that he's after my head now?"

Percy looked at him, surprised. "What do you mean?"

"Who do you think took Harry away from him, and out of his greedy little grasp? He was stealing money from Harry and Sirius's estates. I cancelled the accounts for Harry. Basically, I took his money and his weapon from him. From what someone told me, he is not a happy man with me right now," Ron smirked.

Percy grinned at him. "Looks like you're getting into as much trouble as Harry."

Ron gave him a sharp look, but saw that Percy was grinning at him with amusement. Ron smiled. "Well, the boy did teach me everything I know."

"How is Harry?" Percy asked.

"Catatonic," was Ron's short reply.

Percy rolled his eyes, exasperated. "I know that you went through the Emancipation Rite already, Ron. I also know that you need the Head of Family's permission in order to take their name. Since you're now Ron Black, you would've needed Harry's permission since he is now the Head of the Black family. So obviously Harry can't be catatonic."

Ron looked at him with a worried expression. "Who else knows that I went through the Rite?"

Percy thought a moment before replying, "Well the family knows for sure. There is also Elizabeth Cameron, Head of the Department of Magical Rites. Also Dumbledore knows that you went under the Rite. Father called him after it happened."

"Does he know my new name?" Ron asked.

Percy shook his head and commented, "No, and he's not happy that he doesn't know."

"Big surprise," Ron quipped sarcastically. "So, how did you know my last name was Black?"

Percy looked thoughtful before sighing. "Let's sit down, Ron. There are several things that I need to explain to you about myself," he said. He walked over to the couch and sat down. He looked around at the Muggle looking apartment, his gaze curious. "Where are we?" he asked.

"It's one of the many places that Harry owns. I had someone make a portkey for me before I left. I wanted to make sure that I could talk to you somewhere private without anyone around. I didn't know what

your reaction to seeing me would be," Ron explained as he sat on the couch next to Percy.

"How come you came to see me?" Percy asked.

"Harry and I were talking about Dumbledore, and his hidden nature, and Harry wondered if maybe you had found something about Dumbledore that we didn't know. He thought maybe that was why you separated yourself from the family and him," Ron said.

Percy nodded with understanding and replied, "I did find out about Dumbledore. It actually had nothing to do with Harry at all. I just used that as an excuse. I'm sorry if I hurt him in any way, but I did what I had to do."

Ron leaned back against the couch and looked at him. "Why, Perce? Why did you have to do it?"

Percy closed his eyes and sighed heavily. "Dumbledore has been watched for over fifty years now. There's a group called the Watchers and they have been watching every little thing that he does since before he was even a Headmaster. Sadly, there has been no definite proof of Dumbledore's illegal activities. He knows he's being watched, so he makes sure to cover his tracks. The Watchers had once found evidence against the old bastard, but the man who found it hid the proof, and was killed by Dumbledore before he could tell use what it was. After graduation, I began to work for Fudge, and noticed some things about Dumbledore that got me suspicious. I felt very disenchanted with our esteemed Headmaster," Percy said with sarcasm.

"I never knew that I was being watched by the Watchers. Once they noticed my disillusion with Dumbledore, they had Elizabeth Cameron approach me. She had loads of paperwork about the Headmaster, trailing his suspicious activities, but again no proof. It was enough for me though. I agreed to spy on Dumbledore and Fudge and report anything odd or suspicious. I realized after a couple of years that I couldn't do my work with my family reporting everything I did to Dumbledore. Ron, you must realize that the Weasley family is under Dumbledore's thumb. They live and breathe by his word. It would

take definite proof to turn them from him. You saw what they did to Harry on Dumbledore's word," Percy said and Ron nodded. He'd been there when Dumbledore told the Weasley family that Harry had indeed killed Ginny. After that, the Weasleys turned on Harry.

"Once I realized that, I decided to separate myself from the family. I never wanted to hurt Harry, but I realized that I needed excuse, so I used him and Dumbledore as my reason for leaving the family. Fudge just happened to be there at the time. It was purely coincidental. If it hadn't been that, it would've been something else. I was bound and determined to do my job without Dumbledore watching over me," Percy explained.

"As for your name, well I was there when Lizzie received the paperwork from Ghispok. Since I'm part of the Watchers and I was your brother, she told me. Technically, she isn't supposed to tell anyone, but she didn't see the harm in telling me. She also told me that if I ever had a chance to approach you and Harry that I should take it. We've been looking for you two just as hard as Dumbledore," Percy said with a grin. "Wherever you hid yourself, you did a damn good job. No one can find you anywhere."

Ron smirked at Percy and said, "What's the point in hiding if anyone can find you?"

Percy laughed. "That would be kind of redundant, wouldn't it?"

"So why do the Watchers want to find Harry and me?" Ron asked.

"Lizzie wanted me to let you know that there are some people who don't believe that Dumbledore is the all knowing benevolent man that he portrays," Percy said.

"Who is this Lizzie you keep bringing up?" Ron asked.

"Elizabeth Cameron. She's the Head of the Magical Rites Department. I believe I mentioned her earlier."

Ron nodded in understanding. "I remember now. She's the one who approached you on the Watchers behalf. So what else do you guys know?" Ron asked.

"We also know that Harry pulled a couple of things on Dumbledore that pissed him off. The Power of Attorney, I believe is what it's called, and the magical contract, which I have to admit had the Watchers laughing their asses off," Percy said with a grin.

Ron chuckled. "Yeah, well, that was all Harry. He knew since before Sirius's death that the Headmaster wasn't someone to be trusted. Once Sirius died, well let's just say the blinders came off and he dragged me along with him. It was hard to believe at first, but since Harry's pardon, I've found out a lot of things about Dumbledore that disturb me."

"So, how are Sirius Black and Snape doing?" Percy asked slyly.

Ron looked at him, his expression shocked. "How did you find out about them?" he wondered.

Percy smirked and replied, "We have a spy at Hogwarts. Sirius was seen last night by our spy and Snape left a note this morning. How did you find out he was alive?"

"Harry and I found out that he was alive when I did the Emancipation Rite. When Dobby brought him to us last night, we were stunned to see his condition. Apparently, Dumbledore was going to kill him after he tortured him a bit. He was injured, but he's doing better," Ron said.

Percy frowned. "Do you think he would testify against Dumbledore?"

"More than likely. Of course, he is a little concerned about his safety. I have a feeling that Dumbledore might do something about Sirius and Severus. Severus keeps getting this little smirk when it comes to the Headmaster and I'm not sure why," Ron said.

"Our spy in Hogwarts let us know about the wonderful parting gift that Snape left for the Headmaster," Percy said, mirth shining from his eyes.

"Parting gift?" Ron asked.

"You mean Snape didn't tell you?" Percy asked, amazed.

Ron shook his head. "No, we've been a little busy this morning. Harry needs to learn what he missed in the last eighteen months. Nineteen if you include the month they held him prisoner before the trial. Severus has been giving us the benefit of his knowledge. He wants to make sure that we know all we can if we're ever faced with either Tom or Dumbledore. Once Sirius feels better, he'll be helping as well. Now, what's this about Severus's parting gift and what this about a spy?"

Percy explained what Severus had done to Dumbledore and Ron broke down laughing. "Oh Merlin, I'm going to have to congratulate him on that. That was great. I wish I had been there to see it," Ron chuckled.

"You and me both little brother, though I had a wonderful time sending the pictures to the Daily Prophet, anonymously of course. You'll have to make sure that you read tomorrow's paper," Percy said with a devious grin.

Ron started laughing again. "This will make Harry's day." A few minutes later Ron had finally calmed down. He wiped the tears from his face. "That was great. So, you have a spy in Hogwarts?" he asked.

"Yes. Whoever it is, they're a teacher and a member of the Order. We get a lot of our information from Vates," Percy explained.

"You don't know who it is?" Ron asked.

Percy shook his head and replied, "No, not every Watcher is known. There are many undercover agents. It's too dangerous for all the members to know everyone's identity. All Dumbledore would need is one agent to torture and he would know every agent's name. No, it's

much easier and safer to know a few agents' names. We have ways of identifying the other members of the Watchers."

"Ah, I understand. Better to be safe than sorry," Ron said.

"Correct, now who is this Tom you mentioned?" Percy asked.

Ron smirked at Percy. "Harry told me that I can't keep calling him You Know Who, so if I couldn't call him um...crap I still can't say the name, then I should at least call him by his real name, Tom."

"I bet that'll piss him off if you ever confront him," Percy said.

They both began to laugh as the imagined Voldemort's expression if Ron called him Tom to his face. "I don't think I'm that brave. It's more something Harry would do," he stated, amused.

Ron looked over at Percy and noticed his intense gaze. "What?" he asked.

"You look different. Your hair and eyes are different. In fact, your skin tone is different too. Why?" Percy wondered.

"Harry and I did the Cognatio Frater ritual," Ron replied softly.

Percy's eyes widened with surprise. "You did the Blood Brother Rite? That caused the changes? I've never heard of it doing that," he said.

"The goblin who was there at the time told us it's because of the level of trust between the two of us. We each took a little of each other and merged it with ourselves. Harry also has some changes in his hair, eyes, and skin tone. He also got some of my freckles," Ron said with a grin.

Percy nodded thoughtfully, his gaze looking out into the living room. He turned his gaze back towards Ron, his expression soft. "So that makes him my brother then doesn't it?"

"What do you mean?" Ron asked.

"I told you earlier that you may have gone through the Emancipation Rite, but I still consider you my brother. You have the same blood running through your veins that I do. That makes me your brother regardless of law or magic. I'll be your brother until we both die. Since Harry now has some of our blood running through his veins, then that makes him my brother," Percy said firmly. "Regardless of how the other family members treated you, to me that means that I'll protect you with all that I've got. I thought I was doing that, but I seem to have misjudged things." The redhead looked sad.

Ron's eyes filled up with tears as he heard what Percy, no his brother, was saying. He let loose a sob and felt Percy's arms come around him in a hug. He began to sob as the months of abuse and neglect from his family finally caught up with him. He could hear Percy talking to him, trying to calm him down, but he couldn't help himself. He had so much anger and pain stored up that it needed to be released.

"I'm so sorry, Ronnie" Percy murmured. "I'm so very, very sorry that you had to go through what you did alone. When I was told, I wanted to kill the rest of the family. Regardless of what happens, I want you to know that I'm here for you. This is one Weasley who won't turn on you," he informed Ron softly.

Ron nodded, but continued to cry. It was a while before he calmed down and he lay in his brother's arms, limp with exhaustion. He gave a couple of sniffles before he pulled back and glanced at his brother. "Sorry I'm being such a girl," he said with embarrassment.

Percy grinned at him. "It's all right, Ronnie. It sounded like you needed to do that for a while."

Ron nodded his head and replied, "Yeah, I guess I have. I haven't heard you call me Ronnie in years."

"It seemed appropriate for some reason," Percy said with a blush.

"So what happens now?" Ron asked, wiping the tears from his face.

"Well, I think that Lizzie would like to meet you and Harry. You might want to include Snape and Black on this. I know that Lizzie is eager

to meet Harry. It has something to do with his grandfather, but I'm not for sure what it is. You need to talk to Harry then owl me and let me know what's going on. Use the name Bernard Rigel so I know who it's from. I know Dumbledore has spies all around the Ministry. I don't want to take a chance that he might intercept something from you," Percy said.

Ron nodded. "Actually, I think that Harry will want to take care of things. He'll want to meet somewhere of his own choosing. He doesn't trust anyone except for Sirius, Severus and me. He hasn't been given a lot of reason to trust anyone. By the way, who were the Ministry workers that rushed into the room just as we disappeared?"

"A couple of Watchers. When you told me you had information on Harry and yourself, I let my Superiors know and they decided that a couple of Watcher agents needed to trail us. They had plans on taking you in and questioning you. They weren't for sure if you were legitimate or if you were a spy for Dumbledore. As I said before, he knows he's being watched and he knows that the group's name is the Watchers. He doesn't have clue who is in charge of the group. Hell, I don't even know who's in charge. We're very strict in our screening process. If there is even a slightest chance that there might be a spy, they're captured and screened for potions, the Imperious spell and are questioned under the Veritaserum. I know it's on the shady side of illegal, but people have been killed by Dumbledore over just the hint that they might be part of the Watchers," Percy explained.

Ron leaned back against the sofa, and sighed. "You know, it's suddenly hit me that we are no longer children playing dress up and pretending. We're really in the thick of things. I thought I had gotten used to it with Harry, but I realize that things are a lot more dangerous than they were when I was in school. This is real life and death stuff and there isn't anyway that I can back out of it. I couldn't just leave Harry in a lurch," Ron said with a serious expression.

Percy's expression was filled with understanding. "I know. I think that is the hardest part about being a spy for the Watchers. My life is continually in danger and I can't share it with my family since they are the ones I'm hiding from. I can't tell you what a relief it is to finally

have someone, besides my co-workers, know what I'm doing. At least you'll know the real reason if I die a mysterious death."

Ron looked at Percy, horrified. "Don't even say that."

Percy gave Ron a sorrowful look. "You know as well as I do that it could happen. As you said, we're no longer playing pretend. I just want you to know that if something does happen, I'm glad we had this time together. It feels good to have my brother back," Percy said with a smile.

As much as Ron didn't want to hear it, he had to agree that he was glad for the time. Like Percy, Ron could be found by Dumbledore at any time. He could be captured, tortured and killed by the Headmaster and no one but a few would know the real reason for his death. Suddenly he understood the burden his brother must've been under for the last several years.

"Yeah, I'm glad too," Ron said.

Percy nodded and looked at his watch. "Crap! I need to go. I have a meeting with Fudge in an hour. Lizzie is probably going frantic over my disappearance. I really should let her know that I'm ok," he said.

Ron stood up from the couch and pulled out another portkey from his pocket. "I have a portkey that'll take you to the alley next to the Leaky Cauldron. You can make your way to Ministry from there," he said and handed Percy the portkey.

Percy grabbed the portkey and stood up from the couch. "How are you getting back?"

"Ah, now that would be telling," Ron said with a grin.

Percy chuckled for a moment before his face went serious. "I want you to owl me about Harry, but I also want you to owl just to let me know that you're doing ok. I've been worrying about you since you disappeared."

"I will, Perce. You should be hearing from Harry in a couple of days. We'll probably have to get past Severus's paranoia before Harry can go anywhere. Sirius and him are really protective of Harry," Ron told him with a wry grin.

Percy snorted with laughter. "All right then, I'll talk to you later," he said. He took a step forward and grabbed Ron into a hug. He stepped back and looked at him sternly. "You be careful, Ronnie. Keep safe."

"You too, Perce. Bye," he said as Percy activated the portkey and disappeared.

Ron heaved a sigh of satisfaction at how things went with Percy. He smiled broadly and disappeared out of the apartment flat.

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Percy made his way to Lizzie's office hurriedly. He was eager to share his news with his Superior. He couldn't believe that Ron had voluntarily found him. He had his brother back and he was happy. He could finally share his work with someone in his family, even if they were technically no longer brothers by law and magic. But Percy didn't care about that. Ron had been his brother for eighteen years and no stupid Rite was going to change that.

He knocked on Lizzie's door and waited for her to yell enter. When he heard her voice, he opened the door and walked in. She looked up from her paperwork and her eyes widened in surprise at seeing him standing there. She quickly grabbed her wand and threw a locking spell at the door. She then cast a privacy spell around her office and jumped up from her desk. She rushed around her desk, hurried over to him, grabbing him and gave him a hard hug.

She pulled back and looked at him carefully. Her expression was relieved. "Percy, my boy! I thought for sure you'd been captured by Dumbledore. When Wright and Thomas saw you disappear, I was certain we would be finding your body in the next couple of days. I'm glad to see I'm wrong. Sit," she commanded as she directed him towards a chair. "Tell me what's going on. Who was the man that portkeyed you out of the Leaky Cauldron. Does he have anything to

do with Dumbledore? Where did you go? How did you escape?" she asked quickly.

Percy chuckled at all the questions. "Whoa, Lizzie, calm down. First off, I'm fine. I wasn't harmed. In fact, he wasn't there to harm me. The reason he portkeyed me out of the room is because he saw the two Watcher agents. He doesn't trust anyone at the Ministry and he had no clue as to who they were. As for where we were, it was at some apartment flat. Where, I have no clue. How I escaped, simply put, the man gave me a portkey and sent me on my merry way."

"Great, fine, terrific, but you're leaving out the important part. Who was he?" Lizzie asked impatiently.

Percy shrugged nonchalantly and said, "My brother, Ron." He smirked at Lizzie as her mouth dropped with shock.

He waited and sure enough, she squeaked out, "Your brother? He approached you? But I thought he didn't like you?" she asked, confused.

Percy laughed grimly and said, "There were many misunderstandings between Ron and I, but I believe I've unraveled a lot of them. He should be contacting me in a few days about a meeting between us and Harry Potter."

Lizzie's eyes brightened and she squealed with joy. It was sometimes hard to forget that this woman was 109 years old. She still had a heart of a young woman. "This is great!" she said with joy. "Oh Merlin, maybe we're closer to taking Dumbledore down than we thought."

"Uh, you know I know that Harry's important and all that due to the Prophecy, but why would we need Harry to bring Dumbledore down?" Percy asked, confused.

Lizzie leaned forward, her expression intent. "Because his grandfather was the agent who found the proof we needed to destroy Dumbledore. He hid it in his family vault and only his heir can get the information. When James was killed, we lost all hope of destroying Dumbledore, but now that Harry is willing to talk to us, we might

finally have a chance. A chance that I've wanted for so long and with Harry's help, we can do it. We can finally destroy Dumbledore," she exclaimed, a dazed look on her face.

Percy stared at her, his eyes wide. Whoa, it looks like Harry Potter had a chance to take down two dark wizards. Eh, this should make a wonderful footnote in the history books.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Ron, deep in thought, walked into the castle. He was reviewing his meeting with Percy. Biting his bottom lip thoughtfully, he wondered if this Watcher group could really help them. He was curious about what they could offer. He would like to give them a chance, but understood that Harry was leery about letting people know he was not catatonic and unable to care for himself, even if it seemed that Percy and Elizabeth Cameron were already aware of that.

Ron walked into the den, and saw his dark haired friend reading a book by the fireplace. He cleared his throat. When Harry looked up and saw him, his face brightened. He put the book down, and looked at Ron expectantly.

"So, how did things go with Percy?" Harry asked.

Ron grinned at the memory, and he could see Harry's face relax. He realized then that the faint buzz of anxiousness in the bond had been Harry.

"The visit was good. In fact, it was great. There are a few things that you, I, Severus, Sirius need to go over. We have a few decisions to make," Ron explained.

"Is it something that will affect my future?" Harry asked warily.

Ron nodded his head and replied, "It could if you let it."

Harry gazed at him thoughtfully. "All right. How did Percy react in seeing you again?"

Ron's eyes grew a little misty. "He hugged me, Harry. He told me that even though I went through the Rite, I was still his brother. No law or Rite would change that. We were born with the same blood, and I would be his brother until we both died," he said emotionally.

Harry got up and walked over to his friend and brother. Harry pulled in him for a hug. "I'm glad, Ron. I know you disowned the Weasleys, but it has to be hard for you. You had eighteen years with them loving

you, and to suddenly have them turn on you must've hurt," he said softly.

Ron nodded. "He found out about the abuse, Harry. He told me that if he had known, he would've done something about it. He would've come for me. He told me that I didn't deserve it. To hear him say that was just..." he choked up and Harry held him as Ron began to tremble.

Harry held him until Ron pulled away. He gave Harry a small grin. "Thanks, bro," he said.

Harry smiled and replied, "Not a problem, brother mine."

Ron looked at him and grinned. "You know, Percy considers you his brother now."

Harry looked at him, confused. "Huh? Why?"

"I told him about the Rite. He told me that if you have some of our blood in your veins then that makes you family. Since he considers me his brother by blood then so are you," Ron explained. "He's really sorry about his treatment of you. There was a reason for it. I think he would like a chance to apologize to you."

Harry stared at him with shock. "Ah, well isn't that interesting." He frowned slightly. "He really considers me a brother?"

Ron nodded and Harry took a deep breath. "Wow, that's...um...wow. I didn't expect that."

"Yeah, there's one Weasley out there that doesn't hate us. Who would've ever thought it would've been Percy," Ron pondered with bemusement.

"I'm beginning to think there is a lot more to Percy than we ever realized."

"Yeah, I agree," Ron said. He got misty eyed again and took a shuddering breath. Harry looked over at him and looked at him in concern.

"Sorry, it's just been so emotional. It's hard to understand why one member of the family still loves me while the others don't. What did I ever do to them?" Ron asked.

Harry squeezed Ron's shoulder gently. "You did nothing wrong, Ron. It wasn't your fault that they turned on you. You are a loyal, softhearted, loveable friend and brother. If they can't see it, then they don't need you in their lives," he said. Harry knew it was going to take a long time for Ron to get over the betrayal of his former family, if he ever did. Maybe Percy could help. He hoped so, because he hated seeing his brother in this much pain.

Harry looked up as he heard a noise at the door. He saw Severus looking at them with an ill hidden expression of concern.

"Are you all right, Ron," Severus asked.

Ron sniffed and stepped away from Harry. He looked at Severus and nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine. It was just a little emotional seeing Percy," he explained.

"Ah," Severus said in understanding. "Did things go well?" he asked as he walked over to the couch and sat down.

"Yeah, they did. I told Harry earlier there are some things we need to discuss. In fact..." Ron was interrupted by a voice coming from the doorway.

"Hey, look who Dobby let out of bed. Merlin, I was going crazy. I think Dobby got tired of me begging, and just let me go," Sirius said cheerfully as he walked into the room. He stopped and stared at their serious faces.

"Who died?" Sirius asked semi-jokingly.

"Nobody died Padfoot, we were just talking to Ron," Harry said.

"Oh, well, whatever it is looks serious." Sirius sat on the couch next to Severus, "What's up?"

"Good thing you're here. I was just about to suggest that we go to your room. I learned some things from Percy that I think you all should know," Ron said. "First off, Percy did indeed separate himself from the family because of Dumbledore. He knows exactly what kind of person the old codger really is. In fact, he's part of a group that has been watching Dumbledore for over fifty years."

Harry looked at him, his expression surprised. "Somebody knows about Dumbledore? Why hasn't anything been done? If they're watching him surely they would've gotten him by now."

"There's no definite proof. Percy told me that the Watchers have a list of possible things that Dumbledore has done, but there is no proof. Dumbledore is very careful about covering his tracks. Percy did tell me that someone had found evidence of his wrongdoings, but the man was killed, and the evidence was lost," Ron explained.

"Did Dumbledore kill him?" Severus asked.

Ron shrugged his shoulder and replied, "Not sure, but more than likely. Again, there was no proof that the Headmaster actually killed him."

"Do we know who it was and what kind of evidence it was?" Sirius asked with a frown.

"Percy didn't tell me. In fact, I don't think Percy knows. Individual Watchers don't know everything," Ron said.

Sirius and Severus nodded in understanding. "There would be less chance of leaks. If everyone knew everything, it would take torture of only one person to know everything about the Watchers," Severus said thoughtfully.

"That's what Percy said. There's also a Watcher in Hogwarts. The agent is part of the Order as well. Percy doesn't know who it is

though, just that the name was Vates. He told me that Dumbledore was quite angry. Something to do with some presents he received this morning," Ron said, as he looked at a smug Severus.

They looked at Severus, and he gave them an arched look. "Yes?" he drawled.

"What did you do?" Sirius asked.

They watched as Severus began to snicker. "I didn't do it alone. Dobby helped me. That house-elf has quite a vicious streak," Severus said in amusement.

"Come on, spill. What did you two do?" Harry asked.

Severus grinned and began to explain what Dobby and he had done to their ex-employer. By the time he had finished his tale, Ron, Harry, and Sirius were laughing so hard they couldn't breathe. Severus looked at them smugly and they cracked up again.

Sirius hiccupped and looked at Severus with an appraising look. "You know in school, there were several pranks that were never explained. They were quite good too, but no one ever took credit for them. Was that you?" Sirius asked.

Severus looked over at him and smirked. "I'm not a Slytherin for nothing you know. It's amazing what you learn in potions class if actually pay attention.

Ron and Harry laughed at the disgruntled look on Sirius's face.

Severus looked at Ron and asked, "So, what else did Percy have to say?"

"He wants to set up a meeting between us and Elizabeth Cameron. She's in charge of the Magical Rites department, and she's his contact inside the Watchers. She brought Percy into the group. Apparently the Watchers are quite eager to meet with us," Ron explained.

"How the hell does she know that I'm not catatonic?" Harry asked warily.

"They knew that I did the Rite. They knew that I needed your permission to become a Black, so of course they realized that you had to be awake for that," Ron explained. He paused a moment and frowned thoughtfully. "Um...that must have been before they found out Sirius was alive." Ron groaned in annoyance. "I gave you away, Harry. I never even realized it."

Harry looked at him, surprised. "What do you mean?"

"I didn't know that they knew that Sirius was alive. When Percy told me that you had to be aware in order for the Rite to take place, I agreed. Then Percy told me later that the group knew that Sirius was alive and, therefore, the Head of the Black family – not you. That was smooth," Ron said with admiration.

"But how did they know I was alive?" Sirius asked.

"You were seen last night by their spy in Hogwarts. The same spy let them know about Snape as well," Ron explained. "They would like to know if you would testify against Dumbledore."

"Oh hell, yes!"

"What about this meeting with Elizabeth Cameron?" Harry asked. "Is it even safe? I don't trust it."

Ron looked at Harry with understanding. "I understand, Harry. I told Percy that I would talk to you guys and let him know later whether we would meet with them. I also told him that we would make the meeting plans, not them. You have no reason to trust them."

Harry sighed heavily. "I would like to know what they could offer. I don't want to have to hide from Dumbledore for longer than necessary. In addition, Severus and Padfoot are on Dumbledore's hit list, so they're not safe either. The sooner we get something done, the better." Harry looked over at Sirius and Severus. "What do you think? Should we give them a chance? See what they have to say?"

Severus nodded slowly. "I think that you should meet with Elizabeth Cameron. I've heard of her. She is a no nonsense person, but she is honorable. In fact, I've heard that she doesn't get along with Dumbledore. As Ron said, you make the arrangements. You need to feel safe."

"Padfoot?" Harry asked.

"I agree with Severus on this one. Let's see what they have to offer. It would be nice to have some help with Dumbledore," Sirius said.

Harry chewed on his bottom lip thoughtfully then nodded his head. He turned towards Ron and said, "All right, send Percy an owl. Let him know that we'll meet with him, and that we'll make the arrangements. If they have a problem with that then the meeting will not go forward. After all, if they can't agree to our safety, then they have nothing we want."

"I'll do that. When do you want the meeting to take place?" Ron asked.

Harry cocked his head in thought. He smirked and said, "Tell them two weeks."

"Why so long?"

"I have an idea."

Ron looked at him and groaned, "Please don't tell me that you're bored."

Harry laughed as the Sirius and Severus looked at them with confusion.

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Percy was at his desk, going over paperwork. He humming lightly, indicating that he was in a good mood. He grinned slightly as he remembered the meeting with his brother. Percy really wanted to

work with Ron and Harry. He frowned slightly when he thought of Harry and the apologies he would need to make to his new brother.

Percy leaned back in his chair. He tapped the desk nervously. He wondered if Harry would forgive him for his actions. He wasn't lying to Ron about considering Harry his brother now. Family was by blood, not magic and law, and he would be damned if he gave up his brother, no brothers, now.

An owl landed on his desk, bringing him out of his thoughts. He looked at the unknown owl and took the envelope from its foot. He gave it a treat from the small container on his desk and opened the envelope.

Dear Mr. Weasley,

I would like to inform you that the meeting is a go. We would like to meet with you and your friend in two weeks. I will be sending you a letter telling you of the arrangements when they become known.

I look forward to meeting with you. I think we have much to discuss.

Sincerely,

Bernard Rigel

Percy grinned with excitement. Oh, Lizzie is going to love this. He took out a piece of parchment, a quill and began to write.

Dear Mr. Rigel,

Thank you for your quick response. Two weeks is acceptable and I look forward to your letter.

If you have need of me, please feel free to owl me at any time.

Sincerely,

Percy Weasley

He folded the note and put it in an envelope. He gave it to the owl. "Give this to your master. Thank you," he said.

The owl gave him a hoot, flew off the desk and out the window. Percy grinned excitedly and got up from his desk.

He walked out of his office, down the stairs, and headed towards Lizzie's office. He whistled softly and walked with a slight bounce in his step. When he got to his destination, he stopped and knocked at the door.

"Come in," a voice called out.

He opened the door and walked into the office. Lizzie looked up from her work and smiled. "Percy, to what do I owe the honor of your visit?"

Percy shut the door, walked over to the chair in front of her desk, and sat down. He grinned at her and said, "I got a letter from Bernard Rigel today. The meeting is a go, two weeks from now."

Lizzie's eyes widened at Ron's false name and she started to grin. "Really? This is great news. I start to make the arrangements," she said.

Percy shook his head. "They will be making the arrangements as per our agreement. They have very little reason to trust us, Lizzie," he said seriously.

Lizzie bit her lip gently and sighed. "I know. I wonder why two weeks," she mused thoughtfully.

"Certain people need to heal from what I've heard. Mr. Rigel will be sending a letter letting me know about the arrangements."

"That's good. Keep me posted if anything happens. This is important. We cannot lose this chance. We need it, desperately."

Percy nodded, stood up, and walked to the door. "I think with their help, we might actually have a chance," he said. He opened the door and walked out.

Lizzie sighed as she sat back in her chair. She prayed to whatever god that was listening that things would finally work out. She hoped that Harry Potter would listen to them and agree to work with them. They needed the evidence that William had found. She just wanted this over.

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The next day, Sirius went to Diagon Alley with Harry and Ron. He hadn't been outside for nearly three years, and he was enjoying the sun shining on his face. He glanced around Diagon Alley, noticing that not much had changed. A few new shops and a few missing shops, but essentially Diagon Alley was the same.

He was in his animagus form, as it wasn't well known, and he didn't have a wand to make himself a glamour. Severus had offered to produce a glamour for him, but Sirius didn't trust the smirk on the Potions Master's face so he declined. Harry and Ron didn't have enough control yet to produce a glamour spell for him. When he asked Severus why they were able to use glamours on themselves, he had shrugged and said that it was likely they had a sense of their own magic, and could tell if it was too much. If they used one on Sirius, they might use too much magic, and it would be detrimental to his health.

He bounced around on the street. He ran after a few witches and barked at a couple of teenagers. He was having a grand time being out in the fresh air. He turned around and walked over to Harry. He reached up and licked Harry on the hand. Harry glanced down with a grin and softly said, "Hey, Padfoot. Are you having fun?"

Padfoot barked and wagged his tail. They made their way to Ollivander's Wand shop. As Harry opened the door, Mr. Ollivander came around the rows of wands his eyes lighting up when he saw them standing there.

"Ah, yes...may I help you?" he asked mysteriously as he gazed at them intently.

"I need a wand for my friend," Harry replied.

Mr. Ollivander looked at them then looked at Padfoot. His eyes widened slightly, and he proceeded to the door. He lowered the shade, locked the door, and put up a privacy spell. He turned to look back at the confused and wary men in his shop.

"It's good to see you again, Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley, and Mr. Black. I'm glad to see the news of your death was premature, Mr. Black," he said with a smile.

Harry eyes widened in shock and Ron froze. Padfoot growled and transformed into Sirius. "How did you know it was us?" he snarled.

"I can see your magical auras. Mr. Weasley's aura has changed though. I assumed it was him because Mr. Potter doesn't go anywhere without Mr. Weasley," Mr. Ollivander said. He looked over at Harry and gave them an intent look. "There is a bond between the two of you now. I can see that you share some magic. Did you by chance do the Blood Brother ritual?" he inquired.

Harry looked at him, his gaze wary. "How can you know that just by looking at our auras?" he asked.

"I have had many years to harness my special gift. It's what makes me such a good wand maker. I may not remember faces, but I do remember magical auras," Mr. Ollivander replied as he walked behind the counter.

Harry looked thoughtful. "I have come to realize that I have the ability to read auras also? Would I be able to do the same thing?" he asked.

Mr. Ollivander's face brightened. "You do? Well that is wonderful news. Yes, with training, you should be able to develop your gift to recognize anyone by their auras," he explained.

Harry nodded, understanding how Tonks had recognized him and Ron at the bank. He frowned thoughtfully. He didn't just see Tonks aura, he saw past her Metamorphmagus abilities. Should he be able to do that or did it have something to do with how much power he seemed to have?

He looked at the old wand maker, his gaze curious. "I can see through Metamorphmagus ability, can you? Is it something that is common with our ability?" he asked.

Mr. Ollivander looked a little surprised, but delighted. "You have that talent? Why, that is wonderful. Usually when one had Magical sight, how much power you have deems what you are able to do. The fact that you can see past the Metamorphmagi abilities tells me that you are incredibly powerful. Very few Wizards have been able to do that and the last one that I knew of was at least two hundred years ago. You really should get someone to train your ability. In fact, I have a journal that I kept when I began to harness my ability. It has the steps and exercises I used to help me along the way. If you like, I can give it to you to read. I hope that it can help you in some small way," he said.

"You would do that for me?" Harry asked.

"But of course. What better way to learn than from someone who has the same ability? It should get you on your way until you can find someone to help you. Do you have anyone in mind?" Mr. Ollivander asked.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, there is someone who has offered to teach me. I appreciate your help," he said.

Mr. Ollivander smiled cheerfully. "You're very welcome, my dear boy."

"Harry, how do you know that he won't go to Dumbledore with this?" Sirius asked while glaring at the odd man.

Mr. Ollivander looked over at Sirius, his expression hard. "I do not answer to Mr. Dumbledore. What I do in my own shop is my business," he stated coldly.

Sirius took a step back and swallowed hard. He realized that the odd man who had seemed so absent minded was actually quite powerful. He could feel the man's power flowing off him. Sirius cleared his throat. "Uh, yeah...ok," he said warily.

"Now, is what can I do for you gentlemen?" Mr. Ollivander asked kindly, his power decreasing and fading as if it were nothing.

"I um...need new wand," Sirius said.

"Yes, I would expect you to need a new one. How is it that you didn't die, Mr. Black?" Mr. Ollivander asked curiously.

Sirius snarled and said, "Let's just I was betrayed and leave it at that."

Mr. Ollivander looked at him with a grim expression and nodded. "Very well, if you would, please step closer. Which is your wand hand?" he asked.

Sirius shuffled closer to the counter. "My right," he said.

Mr. Ollivander nodded and went behind the shelves and grabbed several boxes. He set them down on the counter, and began to open them. Sirius tried out several wands, but none of them worked. Mr. Ollivander seemed delighted by the challenge, and grabbed more boxes. Sirius had gone through several more boxes and still nothing worked.

Mr. Ollivander looked at him and hummed. "Wait a minute, I think I have it," he said and rushed into the back room.

Ron leaned over and asked Harry, "Do you think that man might be just a little off?"

Harry snickered and replied, "Just a little."

Sirius snorted. "I think he spends too much time with his wands. He needs to get out some."

Harry and Ron chuckled as Mr. Ollivander came back into the room. He walked over to the counter and put down a very dusty box. "I made this wand years ago, and it never found a person to use it. Try it Mr. Black, I think this might be the one for you," he said eagerly.

Sirius opened the box and picked up the wand. The tip glowed bright gold and a breeze began to blow throughout the shop. Mr. Ollivander smiled cheerfully. "Well, go ahead, give it a wave."

Sirius pointed it at the box lying on the counter and said, "Wingardium Leviosa."

The box rose off the counter and Mr. Ollivander clapped delightedly. Sirius cancelled the spell and looked at his wand with satisfaction. He hadn't had a wand in three years, and he was very pleased with his new acquisition. "What's the wand made out of?"

"The wood is birch and the core is werewolf blood."

Harry looked over at Sirius with grim amusement. "Figures," he said.

Sirius grimaced at the reminder of Remus then shrugged. "How much do I owe you?" he asked.

"Ten galleons," Mr. Ollivander replied. Sirius took out a small bag from his robe pocket, pulled out the money, and handed it to Mr. Ollivander.

"Thank you, Mr. Black. It has been a pleasure doing business with you. Don't worry, I'll keep your business here a secret," Mr. Ollivander said.

"I would appreciate that, Mr. Ollivander," Sirius said. He walked over to the small mirror on the wall and put on a glamour. His hair lightened to a golden brown and his eyes were a sherry color. Looking at his reflection intently, he nodded with satisfaction.

He turned towards Harry and Ron. "Well, let's go. I need to buy some clothes. I haven't had decent clothes in forever."

They said their goodbyes to Mr. Ollivander and left the shop. Harry looked over at Sirius and said, "I need to go to the book store. You think you'll be okay on your own?" he asked.

Sirius rolled his eyes and replied, "Yes, Mother, I'll be fine."

Harry crossed his arms and looked at him disapprovingly. "You know as well as I do that Dumbledore would love to get his hands on you. Don't do anything stupid and for Merlin's sake, don't draw attention to yourself," he said sternly.

Sirius looked at him and grinned. "You know, you remind me of your mother when you do that."

Harry's expression showed surprise then he grinned. "Really? Well, regardless you be careful. I just got you back. I'm not ready to lose you again. Do you have your emergency portkey?" he asked.

Sirius patted him on the arm and said, "Yes, Harry, I do. I'll be fine. Go, do what you need to do. I'll meet you at the Leaky Cauldron when I'm done."

Harry nodded and grabbed a hold of Ron. He dragged him away and headed towards the bookstore. Sirius looked around and with a bounce in his step, walked down the street.

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Several hours later Sirius, with shrunken bags of clothes in his pocket, was wandering around aimlessly, trying to figure out if he needed anything else, when he slammed into someone.

"Crap. I'm sorry. I wasn't looking," he apologized. He bent down to help the man up, but froze when he saw that it was Remus Lupin.

"No, it was my fault. I didn't see you," Remus said. He looked at Sirius and frowned. "Are you all right? You don't look too good."

Sirius took a step back and nodded stiffly. "I'm fine. If you'll excuse me, I need to be on my way." He stepped around Remus and proceeded down the street.

Remus looked after the man, confused by the man's actions. He sighed. The man must've realized who he was. He cursed the day that Snape let the Wizarding World know that he was a werewolf. He was used to this reaction, but it still bothered him. He took in a deep breath to calm himself and his eyes widened as he realized that the man who he had just seen was actually Sirius. He ran down the street, after Sirius.

Sirius was lost in his thoughts when he felt a hand on his shoulder, turning him around. He yelped with surprise. He looked at Remus, shocked, Crap, he thought.

"Can I help you?" he inquired politely.

"Sirius, is that you?" Remus asked softly.

"I'm sorry, you must be mistaking me for someone else," Sirius informed him and turned to walk off.

"Padfoot, if you don't want me making a scene, you had better talk to me. I know it's you. Remember, I'm a werewolf. I know your scent," Remus said.

Sirius turned towards Remus, grabbed his arm, and pulled him into a dark alleyway. He looked at his old friend and glared. "Fine, you know who I am. Big deal. I don't have anything to say to you."

Remus closed his eyes, hurt. Ron had told him. He knew that Ron would, but he had foolishly hoped that things would be different. He opened his eyes and looked at Sirius sadly. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Sirius leaned forward, his expression furious. "I'm not the one you have to apologize to, Moony. I trusted you. I made you his godfather, and you turned your back on him. He was the son I never had. I trusted you to care for him. Why? Why did you desert him when he needed you the most?"

Remus shook his head with despair. "I don't have a good reason. I...I...I foolishly blamed him for your death," the werewolf whispered. "I thought he was being punished for killing you. The wolf in me wanted his blood for killing off the last of the Pack."

Sirius eyes widened with horror and anger. With a roar of rage, Sirius punched Remus in the face. Remus fell to the ground and looked up at Sirius with shock and surprise.

"You blamed a child for my death? A child who had nothing to do with it? It wasn't Harry's fault, you asshole. Even if it had been, you were the adult. You don't think that Harry had his own guilt? Merlin, Moony, what kind of person blames a child for a death?" Sirius snarled.

"I'm sorry, Padfoot. All I can say is that I lost my head. I turned on him and I betrayed James, Lily and your memory. Molly told me that I had been named as his godfather, but I didn't want the responsibility. I wasn't in right frame of mind," Remus said with despair written on his face.

"No, Moony, you weren't. I'm ashamed that I ever thought you could be his godfather. I'm ashamed to have called you a friend. I never thought you would be like this. You're no better than Peter," Sirius stated coldly.

"Well, well, well isn't that interesting. I followed the werewolf in hopes of finding the Weasley brat, and to my surprise, I find my dead cousin. Who just so happens isn't as dead as he should've been. Guess I'm going to have to take care of that," a voice said behind him.

Sirius whirled around as Remus got off the ground. They pulled out their wands and faced the three Death Eaters standing at the entrance of the alley. Bellatrix Lestrange was smirking at them, along with Avery and Goyle.

"Bella," Sirius snarled.

"Sirius," she smirked. "I never would've known it was you if I hadn't heard it myself. Pretty good glamour you have there."

"Still a physco I see? Are you still following that miserable excuse for a Dark Lord?" Sirius sneered.

Bella's face darkened with rage and she lifted her wand up. "Diffindo," she yelled out.

Sirius ducked and the spell went over his head. He waved his wand and yelled "Stupefy." He watched as Bella ducked out of the way of the spell. It hit Avery and he went down.

Remus looked over at Sirius and said, "I'll take Goyle, you take care of your cousin."

"With pleasure," Sirius snarled.

Sirius lifted his wand and yelled, "Adflictatio."

"Protega," Bella shouted and the spell bounced off the shield. Sirius ducked out of the way.

"My, my cousin, maybe there is some good Black blood left in you. That was almost a Dark Spell. What would the Wizarding World think of that?" she asked in a mocking tone.

Sirius smirked at her and said, "You forget Bella dear, the Wizarding World thinks I'm dead. I could torture you, and then kill you, and no one would be the wiser. Hell, no one would care. You're nothing but a crazy, pathetic, Death Eater."

"The Dark Lord will win and I will be at his side when he does," she shrieked angrily. "You will regret your words."

Sirius smirked at her and said, "Bring it on."

Bella raised her wand and began to fling spells at him. They battled tirelessly. Sirius saw out of the corner of his eye that Remus had taken down Goyle and was watching them battle it out.

"Wingardium Leviosa," Sirius shouted and lifted a large wood pole that had been lying in the alleyway. He threw the pole towards his cousin. Bella jumped out of the way, but not before the pole hit her in the arm. She screamed in pain and Sirius saw that her left arm hung useless.

"Ouch, did that hurt?" Sirius taunted. "Is this the best you have? No wonder the Dark Lord hasn't won yet. If you're his best, then we have nothing to worry about."

"You'll pay for that," she cried angrily. "Avada Kedavra."

Sirius's eyes widened and he ducked out of the way of the green light. He hit the ground and rolled. He got up on his knees and yelled, "Stupefy."

Bella ducked and the spell flew over her. "Expelliarmus," she cried.

The spell hit Sirius and he went flying into the wall of the building as his wand flew into Bella's hand. His head slammed into the building and he slid to the ground. He groaned in pain and things were going dark. He lay there in a daze and watched as Bella walked over to him.

"Well, that was fun, but I'm afraid our time has come to an end. This time, I'm going to make sure you're really dead. Avada Ked..."

"No!" a shout was heard and Remus slammed into Bella. He smashed her against the wall of the building and fought her for Sirius's wand. The wand dropped and he held her against the building. "You're not killing him again," he growled, his amber eyes glowing with rage.

Bella snarled, raised her knee, and kneed him in the groin. Remus wailed with pain and fell to the ground. Bella sneered at the downed man. "You need to learn your place, werewolf. Crucio," she hollered.

The spell hit Remus and he began to twitch and scream in pain. He lay there convulsing. Bella lifted the curse and started to laugh. "Oh, this is too easy. I really thought you would be a challenge." She kicked Remus in the chest and Remus screamed in pain as a rib

broke. "Crucio," she called out lazily. She watched in glee as Remus began to scream some more. She took the spell off again and squatted down next to the werewolf.

"You should have sided with the Dark Lord like the rest of the werewolves. Once they do their duty, then the Dark Lord will destroy them all. You disgusting creatures should be put down. I shall enjoy the privilege of killing you. Good bye, werewolf," Bella said as she stood up.

"Stupefy," a voice called out. Bella went down as footsteps came down the alleyway.

"Remus? Oh god, are you all right?" the voice asked.

Remus moaned with pain. "Sirius? Is Sirius all right?" he asked hoarsely.

"Sirius? Remus, Sirius is dead," the voice said.

"No, not dead," he slurred.

"WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?" Ron's voice came from the alley's entrance.

He ran to Remus and looked down in shock. He looked over at the other body and hissed angrily. He ran over to Sirius and checked on him. He sighed in relief as he felt a pulse.

"Ron?" the voice asked, confused.

He turned towards the voice and his eyes widened with shock. "Hermione?"

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

"Ron, what's going on?" Hermione asked, confused.

"I guess that's the question I should be asking you. What happened here? Wait, how did you know it was me?" Ron asked urgently.

"Your voice," she replied smugly. "Your glamour looks good, but you forgot to change your voice.

Ron cursed and stared at Hermione warily. "What happened here?" he asked.

"I heard fighting, so I came to investigate. I saw Lestrage pull her wand on Remus, so I stopped her. We have to get Remus back to Hogwarts. Who is that guy? Remus kept going on about Sirius," Hermione explained, her expression bewildered.

Ron's eyes widened and he glanced down at the man on the ground. Remus looked up at him with a pleading look. Ron shook his head and reached down to move Sirius.

"You take Remus to Hogwarts. I have my own problems to deal with," Ron said coldly.

"You can't leave yet, Dumbledore is looking for you. He's quite angry that you left Hogwarts with Harry. You shouldn't have done that, Ron," Hermione said, her tone filled with disapproval.

Ron snarled and turned to glare at his former friend. "Listen up Hermione, I don't give a damn what the Headmaster wants. Now, take Remus to Hogwarts and leave me the hell alone."

"Damn it Ron, don't you ignore me!" Hermione yelled.

Ron glared at her coldly. "Do you really want to worry about this now while Remus is on the ground in pain? I don't have time for your crap, Hermione. Take Remus and go," the redhead snarled.

He turned back to Sirius and began to look for the emergency portkey. He winced as Sirius moaned in pain, still dazed by whatever spell that had hit him. Merlin, at this rate, Harry was never going to let Sirius leave the castle. Hopefully, Harry wouldn't find them until Hermione left with Remus. Ron was thankful that Harry was a paranoid bugger and insisted that they search for Sirius when he was late, and before his glamour wore off.

"Ron, please, no..." Remus moaned weakly.

Ron looked over at the werewolf and shook his head. "You have no right to ask for anything from me. I don't help those who betrayed Harry," he growled. He sighed in relief as he found the portkey. He leaned over Sirius and scooped him closer.

"I'm afraid I can't let you go, Ron," Hermione said.

Ron turned to yell at her, and realized that her wand was pointed at him. He grimaced with anger and frustration. "What the hell do you think you're doing, Hermione?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry to have to do this Ron, but the Headmaster is looking for you. You need to come back to Hogwarts. It's for your own good. You should've never left in the first place. If you would just tell me where Harry is, I can go get him. He needs me," Hermione said.

Ron cursed furiously. Merlin, how the hell am I going to get help on this one? he thought a moment then closed his eyes and slowly opened the bond between him and Harry. He pushed a sense of urgency and fear through the bond. He concentrated hard and pushed the image of the alleyway through the bond. He didn't know if it would work or not, but he had to try. He almost shouted in glee when he felt a sense of confirmation. Harry was on his way.

Trying to buy time for Harry to get there, Ron snarled at her, "He doesn't need you, you backstabbing bitch. Remus, Dumbledore and you betrayed him. There is no way that Harry will ever want you around him. You can take me to Hogwarts, but you can't make me talk."

Hermione bit her lip nervously. She walked over to Remus and helped him up, her wand was still pointed at Ron. "You all right, Remus?" she asked the injured man.

"I'll be fine. I just need to find my wand," he said and Hermione nodded.

"Harry and I should've let the troll get you in our first year. You're nothing but a backstabbing, mindless sycophant. I thought you had a mind of your own, Hermione. Why don't you use it? Why is Dumbledore so bent on getting Harry and me back to Hogwarts? To save us from Voldemort? Please, that pathetic old man can't even find us," Ron said contemptuously. "Oh no, the esteemed Headmaster has a far more nefarious purpose in mind. He's not the kind benevolent man you seem to think he is. He does things to people that would make you shudder. You would be horrified by what I've found out about our dear Dumbledore. It's too bad you can't get your head out of his arse enough to think for yourself," Ron said with disdain.

Hermione shook her head. "You're wrong, Ron. Dumbledore has done nothing but help the Wizarding World. He only wants to protect Harry and you. He does what he can for the betterment of the Wizarding World. I don't know where you got your information, but you're wrong. Dumbledore is not like the man you're trying to portray him as," she said firmly.

Ron gave her a contemptuous look. "Right, you go on believing that, Hermione. I pity you. I pity the young girl who used to be so idealistic. I pity the girl who used to think that Harry and I were her best friends; the same young girl who would do anything for us. I don't know who you are, Hermione, but I can tell one thing, you're definitely not that girl anymore," he said sadly.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Ron. I hope we'll have an opportunity to talk and straighten things out. You'll see, Ron. Everything will be just fine once we get back to Hogwarts. The Headmaster will keep you safe, and I'll find Harry and we'll keep him safe as well," Hermione said. She raised her wand and began to utter a spell.

"Stupefy."

Ron flinched and was surprised as Hermione froze and fell over. Ron looked and saw Remus holding out his wand. Remus gazed at Hermione for a second and seemed to shudder all over. He glanced at Ron and smiled painfully. "I don't know what's going on, but I can't let Padfoot get captured again. You need to leave. I'll take care of Hermione and the Death Eaters," he said.

Ron gaped at him. He saw Remus swaying and the man suddenly crumpled to the ground, unconscious. Ron looked around the alleyway. He stood up and walked over to Lestrage. He pointed his wand at her and said, "Stupefy." He nodded in satisfaction and walked over to Avery and Goyle. He proceeded to stupefy them both again.

Ron went over to Remus and checked him over. He bit his lip worriedly. The werewolf was unconscious. He could see several abrasions and deep gouges on his arms. Ten to one, he had been under the Cruciatus curse, and he needed the countering potion for it. He wasn't too worried about him though. Remus was a werewolf and they were a hearty lot. While Remus might be in some pain, there was nothing life threatening to worry about. Even if he had been held under the Cruciatus curse, it took a lot to harm a werewolf. He walked over to the unconscious Sirius and bent down. There was blood coming from his head and a large cut on his arm. Dobby was going to freak out; poor Sirius was not going to get out of bed for days.

He whirled around as he heard footsteps coming up the alley. He sighed in relief as he realized it was Harry.

"Hey, mate," Ron greeted.

"What the hell happened?" Harry demanded as he gazed at the unconscious people laying on the ground.

Ron shrugged and replied. "From what I can tell, Sirius and Remus were attacked by Death Eaters, and then Hermione found them."

"So, why is Hermione laying on the ground?" Harry asked as he walked over to Sirius.

"That was Remus's fault. She had her wand trained on me. She was going to force me back to Hogwarts. I think Remus took an exception to that idea and stupefied her," Ron told him. "Whatever the case, we need to get Sirius to the castle, the Death Eaters to the Ministry, Remus, and Hermione back to Hogwarts. I need your help on this one," Ron said.

Harry shrugged. "I'll do what I can. Just remember, I don't have the control I need to do much magic."

Ron cursed. "I forgot about that. Where are the Aurors when you need them? That's another thing, why didn't anyone hear or see the fight? I figured someone would come running."

"There's a Notice-Me-Not spell and a silencing spell covering the entry way to the alley. I only found you because of the bond," Harry said. He frowned a moment. "So, how did you find it? Wait, how did Hermione find it?"

Ron shrugged and said, "Not sure, I just felt a pull to come here. I don't know why. As for Hermione, she was already here when I got here."

"Crap, that's not good. You don't think she had anything to do with this do you?" Harry asked.

Ron frowned slightly. "I'm not sure. I saw her standing over Remus when I came up the alleyway. She said that she heard fighting, but that should've been impossible with the spells up."

Harry looked down at his former friend and said, "I think you need to awaken her to find out what's going on. As much as I don't like her anymore, I can't really see her joining the Death Eaters. Her presence here does look suspicious though."

"Do you think maybe she's working for Dumbledore?" Ron asked.

Harry shrugged and replied, "I'm not sure. Let's take care of the Death Eaters, Sirius, and Remus first then you can interrogate Hermione." Harry looked at the stunned Death Eaters with a thoughtful look. "Do you still know how to make a portkey? We can send the Death Eaters to the Ministry. Tie them up with a pretty little bow and leave them in Fudge's office," Harry smirked.

Ron grinned and replied, "Oh yes, the Minister would love you for that."

Harry snorted with contempt. "It's not like I'm telling him I did it." Ron laughed at Harry.

Ron looked over at Sirius. "We need to send Sirius back to the castle though. He looks pretty beat up," he said, concerned.

Harry nodded and replied, "Did you find his portkey?"

"Yeah, it was in his pocket. You know one of us will have to go with him and let Severus know what happened."

"Mmm...that won't work. Oh, I know, Dobby!" Harry called out.

The house-elf appeared before him and his widened when he saw the bodies lying on the ground.

"What happened?" Dobby asked, upset.

"I need you to take Sirius back to the castle. Let Severus know what happened. Sirius and Remus were attacked by Death Eaters. We need to stay here and clean up," Harry explained.

Dobby nodded in understanding and walked over to Sirius. "That's it. I'm not letting Mutt leave the castle ever again," he said firmly.

Harry and Ron laughed as Dobby bent down and grabbed Sirius's arm. With a wave to Harry and Ron, he disappeared.

"Sirius is in trouble," Ron sing-songed. Harry snickered at the comment.

Ron picked up a small box that was lying in the alley. He pulled out his wand and imagined the Minister's office. "Portus," he said. He handed the portkey to Harry who walked over to Lestrangle, Avery, and Goyle. With a wave of his wand, he bound their bodies together. Harry laid the portkey on their bodies and activated it. The Death Eaters disappeared.

"Sirius should be happy that his cousin has been detained," Ron said.

"Yeah, for as long as they stay captured."

Ron hummed in agreement and walked over to Hermione. He gazed at her and felt a great sadness overwhelm him as he realized that the woman he had once loved no longer existed. He sighed softly and felt Harry's hand on his shoulder, giving him a squeeze in comfort.

"You might want to get out of sight. You know how smart she is. She might realize that it's you standing there," Ron told him. Harry nodded and walked behind the stunned woman.

Ron pointed his wand and cast a spell. He wanted to make sure that Hermione was bound. With another wave of his wand, he muttered, "Ennervate."

Hermione groaned and her eyes fluttered open. She looked around blearily and saw Ron standing over her. Remus was still on the ground, and the strange man that Ron had looked over was gone.

She tried to move, but realized that she was bound. She looked up at Ron with a frown. "Release me, Ron," she demanded.

"Shut up, Hermione. I'm the one in charge here, not you. I have a question for you. You had better think carefully before you answer. How you get treated from now on depends on your answer," Ron informed her coldly.

"What? Ron, what the hell is going on? Why am I bound?" she asked.

Ron rolled his eyes. "It might have something to do with the fact that you held your wand on me. It didn't make me happy. Now, my question is, how did you find Remus?" he asked coldly.

"What do you mean? I heard fighting and followed the sounds," she said arrogantly.

Ron squatted down and glared at her. "I'm not stupid, Hermione. I'm not the same naïve Gryffindor you grew up with. I know very well that there is a Silencing spell on the entrance of the alleyway, not to mention the Notice-Me-Not spell. I want to know how you found Remus," he said.

Hermione sneered at him. "Well, if you know about the spells, then how did you get here?"

Ron laughed coldly and glared at her. Hermione would've flinched if she could've moved. "We're not talking about me. Answer the question," Ron said.

"And if I don't?" she asked snottily.

"I know a couple of Death Eaters who would like a mudblood to play with," he said coldly.

She gasped with shock. "You wouldn't!" she exclaimed.

Ron bent down further and got in her face. "Try me," he snarled, his eyes hard.

Hermione looked at him warily. She had no clue if Ron would do what he was threatening or not. She suddenly realized that this cold young man in front of her wasn't the same boy she went to school with. That Ron was bumbling, naïve and a bit stupid. This Ron was powerful and confident. She internally winced at the cold glare he gave her. She would never admit it, but this Ron scared her.

Hermione licked her dry lips and replied. "I was following Remus. I thought he might lead me to you. I wanted to find you and take you to Dumbledore."

"So, you're working for the Headmaster then?" he asked.

"No, Dumbledore doesn't know anything about this. I wanted to help him. He's been so angry lately. I just wanted to help him relieve some of the pressure he has been under," she said softly.

Ron sneered at her. "Don't you find it odd that the Headmaster, the kind and benevolent man that we all grew up with, is angry? I think he's acting a little odd, don't you?"

Hermione frowned slightly. "I'm sure he has his reasons," she said warily.

"Of course he does. Continue," Ron demanded.

"I followed Remus and then I lost him. I finally found him again, and he was walking into the alley with another man. I went to follow him and saw Bellatrix, Avery and Goyle appear in the alley. They cast an Invisibility spell on themselves and threw up the Silencing spell and the Notice-Me-Not spell. I knew that Remus was in the alley, and I knew that he was in trouble. It took me a while to overcome the spells and find the alley. Once I did, I ran into the alley and saw Bellatrix standing over Remus and I stupefied her. The unknown man was lying on the ground with the rest of the Death Eaters," she explained.

"You had nothing to do with this then? You're not a Death Eater?" Ron asked coldly.

"NO! I would never...I can't believe you would ask that of me," Hermione said, her expression outraged.

"Why is that?" Ron wondered. "From the looks of it, you could've very well have been. You were standing over Remus you know. You were the only one standing."

"I'm your friend, Ron. You know me better than that," Hermione said.

"Isn't it interesting that you use that argument. Didn't Harry tell you the same thing when you turned on him?" Ron asked slyly.

Hermione gaped at him. Ron pointed his wand towards her and said, "Stupefy."

"Have I ever told you that you make a great friend?" Harry asked.

Ron grinned at him. "I do what I can." He bent down to pick up a dirty old bottle from the ground.

Ron looked over at Harry. "So where should we put her? In the Forbidden Forest or right outside the gates of Hogwarts?" he smirked.

Harry grinned at him. "Now Ron, you know you would be upset if something happened to her. Too bad the wards around Hogwarts don't allow portkeys. I would love to strip her naked and port her right in the middle of the Great Hall during lunch," Harry said wistfully.

Ron laughed at Harry's expression. "Should we obliviate her?" Ron pondered.

"I can't do it, can you? Do you know the spell well enough to do it?" Harry asked.

Ron bit his lip and shook his head. "No, my control is still a little off. I'm afraid if I try, I might fry her brains. Of course, that might be an improvement."

Harry nodded absently as he turned towards Remus. "I guess we should take care of him. Hope he isn't in too much pain. We've taken a little time talking. You think he might be angry?" Harry asked with a grin.

Ron snorted and said, "Who cares?"

Harry grinned at him. "You know, Remus knows that Sirius is alive. What are the chances that Dumbledore will keep him alive with that knowledge?"

Ron glanced at him, surprised. "You think he would kill Remus?"

Harry gave him a look. "Dumbledore kept Sirius locked up for almost three years. You know as well as I do that Dumbledore will take every precaution he can to keep that little fact hidden for as long as possible. In fact, what does Remus actually do for the Order? The rest of the werewolves are siding with Voldemort. What use is he to Dumbledore?" Harry asked.

"You're right of course, but he betrayed you. Should we really save him?" Ron asked.

"Harry..." Remus groaned.

Harry stiffened and looked down at Remus. "Crap," he muttered. "Now we can't send him back to Hogwarts. He knows that I'm awake and fully functional. Dumbledore also won't like it that Remus stunned Hermione to stop her from forcing you back to Hogwarts. I think his days are seriously numbered now."

"So, what do you want to do? Take him with us?" Ron asked.

Remus looked up at Harry with sorrowful eyes. He struggled to sit up. "Harry, you're ok. I'm sorry Harry, so very sorry," he said with tears in his eyes.

"Shut up Remus, I don't want to hear your pathetic excuses," Harry snarled at the werewolf. Harry sighed and looked over at Ron. "Yeah, we'll take him with us. I'll have Dobby find a place to lock him up. I refuse to give him the freedom of my home. Send Hermione on her merry way, and let's go. I need to see how Padfoot is doing."

Ron nodded and made the portkey. He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment. "I really should wake her up before sending her on her way. She could be outside the castle gates for a while."

Harry shrugged and said, "You do what you want."

Ron pursed his lips then shook his head. "Nope, she'll just have to come out of the spell on her own. Next time, maybe she'll think twice about pointing her wand at me." Ron laid the portkey on her body, activated it, and Hermione disappeared.

Harry looked over at Remus and sighed. He glanced at Ron and asked, "You still have Sirius's portkey?"

"Yes, right here."

"All right, let's go," Harry said. They walked over to Remus and helped him off the ground. Harry bent down and picked up the two wands that were lying on the ground.

"You're coming with us. I personally would let you go back to Dumbledore and face the consequences, but Sirius would be upset if you died. So you get the joy of being locked up in Harry's home. Let's go, werewolf," Ron said coldly. He held out the sock and Remus and Harry placed their hands on it. Ron activated the portkey and they disappeared.

They reappeared in the castle's den. Harry sat Remus down on the couch and called out for Dobby.

Dobby glared at Remus and crossed his arms, his face angry. "What is that doing here?"

Harry and Ron grinned as Remus stared at Dobby with shock. Harry glanced at Remus, his expression unexplainable, and looked back at Dobby. "He came to as Ron and I were talking. He knows that I'm aware. I wasn't about to send him back to Dumbledore with that information," Harry explained.

Dobby continued to glare at Remus. "Why didn't you kill it?"

"Dobby, I know you're angry, but I don't kill in cold blood," Harry said warily.

Dobby snorted with contempt. "Fine, then let me do it. Your betrayers shouldn't be allowed to live."

"Uh..." Harry trailed off nervously. He knew that Dobby had changed, becoming more aggressive, but he never knew he could be so cold, so callous.

"Now Dobby, where would be the fun in killing the werewolf right away? You need a good torture first," Severus said as he walked into the room.

He moved to stand next to Harry and looked down at the dazed and frightened Remus lying on the couch. He walked over, took out his wand, and scanned Remus, checking out his injuries. "Dobby, could you get the anti-Cruciatius potion. He's been under the curse."

Dobby glared even harder. "Let him suffer," he stated coldly.

"Dobby, take my advice. You'll want him in perfect condition if you're going to torture him. He'll last longer that way," Severus said calmly. Dobby's face brightened and he disappeared.

"Severus, what's with Dobby?" Harry asked warily.

"He's not happy that Sirius was injured. He's a little upset right now. Since Lupin is here, he has someone to take it out on," Severus explained with a smirk.

Harry had a feeling there was more to it than that, but he shrugged. "Ok, whatever floats his boat. How is Padfoot?" he asked.

"He'll be fine. I healed the injuries. They were minor. He should be more concerned at what Dobby will do to him when he wakes up. Dobby is not a happy house-elf," Severus said with a grin.

Harry laughed at the statement. Dobby appeared and handed Severus several potion bottles. Severus opened one and gave it to Remus to drink. "Drink it," Severus commanded coldly.

Remus grabbed the bottle and looked at it warily. He glanced around the grim looking faces and gulped. He quickly downed the potion and handed the bottle back to Severus. The Potions Master opened another bottle and handed it to Remus. The werewolf took it meekly and drank it. Severus grabbed the bottle out of his hands, and scanned him once again.

He nodded with satisfaction. "He'll be fine. Luckily, it's not a full moon tonight. I don't have any Wolfsbane."

Harry shrugged. "We have a dungeon. He could've transformed there."

"So, what do you want to do with him?" Ron asked.

"Dobby, find a bedroom and lock him in. Make sure to feed him though. I wouldn't want to be accused of abusing or neglecting my prisoner," Harry sneered. "Make sure the bedroom is halfway decent, please."

Dobby frowned but nodded his head. "Of course, Harry. I have just the place. Sage cleaned it out this morning in fact." He walked over to Remus and grabbed his arm. "Let's go," he said and disappeared with Remus.

"Ok, now that Dobby's gone, can you tell me what's really going on?" Harry whined. "Dobby is aggressive yes, but nothing like that."

Severus smirked at Harry. "It's something he's trying to learn. He wants to be scarier, more frightening. I guess when he saw Lupin, he took the opportunity."

Ron laughed. "I don't know about Lupin, but I was scared of him."

Harry cracked up and Severus smirked. Dobby popped back into the room and grinned at them. "So how was I?"

Harry grinned at him. "You were perfect, Dobby. I think Remus thinks you're going to torture him later."

Dobby smirked at him and said, "Who says I'm not?" He disappeared and Severus laughed at the expression on Harry's face.

"He was kidding right? Right? Severus, please tell me he was kidding. Severus, don't walk out of here," Harry yelled after the laughing Potions Master who was walking out of the room.

"Blimey, Harry, I think Dobby's gone around the bend," Ron said.

Harry sighed heavily. "I'm surrounded by crazy people," he moaned.

"Oi! I'm not crazy," Ron cried with outrage. Harry just shook his head and walked out of the den.

"Harry, I mean it, I'm not crazy," Ron yelled. "Harry? Harry! Damn it!"

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"Dumbledore!" a voice yelled from the fireplace.

Dumbledore frowned and walked into his office. He had heard the floo being activated and sighed with annoyance. He didn't like being interrupted as he relaxed with a book and a small snifter of scotch in his hidden room.

"What is it, Arthur?" Dumbledore asked.

"The Minister is in a right state. Apparently three Death Eaters were portkeyed into his office," Arthur said.

"Is he all right?" Dumbledore asked with false concern. His dislike for the current Minister of Magic was barely hidden – most people put it down to the Minister's obvious incompetence. If the man died, Dumbledore would have the opportunity to place his man or woman in the position of Minister of Magic. It was something he had been thinking about for a while. Maybe he should just have Fudge killed. Arthur Weasley would make a good puppet to control the Ministry. It was something he would have to think about further.

"Yes, he's fine. He was more startled than anything. The Death Eaters were stunned and bound," Arthur explained.

Dumbledore felt a momentary stab of disappointment that the Minister was still alive, but he shrugged it off. "Who were they?" he asked.

"Lestrangle, Avery, and Goyle," Arthur said with a slight smile.

"Which Lestrangle?"

"Bellatrix."

"Do you know what happened?" Dumbledore asked with a slight sense of dread.

Arthur shook his head. "Not yet. Someone cast a very powerful Stunning spell on them. It's going to take a little while to wear off."

"Powerful? Do we know who did it?" Dumbledore asked.

"No, the magical signature isn't in any of the Ministry records," Arthur explained.

Dumbledore nodded with understanding, a small frown of thought creasing his forehead. "Could it be someone from another country?" he asked.

Arthur shrugged. "It could be. We don't really know right now. I don't think the Minister cares. He's taking credit for the capture of three top Death Eaters."

Dumbledore snorted in disgust. "I'm sure." The old wizard sighed heavily and said, "Let me know what comes to light would you? I'm quite curious as to who detained them."

"Of course, Albus," Arthur said. His head disappeared from the fireplace.

Dumbledore was lost in thought as he walked back to his secret room. Who was the new player? It was someone the Ministry didn't know. If this person took down three Death Eaters, maybe he should think of recruiting him for the Order. He could use someone that was powerful.

Thirty minutes later, he heard Minerva urgently calling him. "Albus! Albus, are you in here?"

Dumbledore sighed and set his book down. He walked down the stairs that led to his office, where he saw Minerva pacing in front of his desk, a slight frown on her face.

"What is it, Minerva?" he asked.

"Filch found Hermione by the gates. She was stunned and then portkeyed back. Poppy is having a little trouble getting the stunning

spell off. Apparently, whoever cast the spell is quite powerful," Minerva explained.

Dumbledore's eyebrows flew up in surprise. That was twice today that someone had been stunned and portkeyed somewhere else. The head of the Order wondered if maybe it was the work of the same person. If so, why was Miss Granger stunned and portkeyed to Hogwarts? Looking at Minerva, he said, "Let's go. I'll see what I can do."

Minerva nodded, turned, and walked out of the office with Dumbledore following her.

A few minutes later, they walked into the Infirmary and headed towards the bed on which Hermione was lying. Poppy was scanning her patient, but looked up as she heard them approach.

"Headmaster, Minerva," she greeted crisply.

"Have you been able to counter the spell?" Dumbledore asked.

Poppy frowned, annoyed. "No, I haven't. Whoever cast this spell is very powerful."

"If I may?" Dumbledore inquired.

"Please, Headmaster. I think if anyone can do it, you can," Poppy said.

Dumbledore nodded, took out his wand, and pointed it at Hermione. "Ennervate."

There was a brief glow around Hermione then it disappeared. Dumbledore looked at her with surprise. There is quite a bit of power in the spell. Interesting, he thought. Dumbledore frowned and cast Ennervate with more power. The stunning spell held a moment longer before disappearing.

Hermione's eyes opened and she looked around the room warily. "Professor Dumbledore?" she wondered. "Am I at Hogwarts?"

"Yes, child, you are. Can you remember what happened?" Dumbledore asked kindly. "Can you tell me who stunned you?"

"Yes, it was ah...um...well I'm pretty sure it was," Hermione began then stopped. She looked at the Headmaster with surprise. "I can't remember," she exclaimed, shocked.

"You mean you can't remember at all?" Dumbledore asked, frustrated.

"No, its like the memory is there, but I can't access it. I don't think I've been obliviated. I just can't remember. I know it was important though," Hermione said with a frown.

Dumbledore bit back a growl of annoyance. He turned and looked at Poppy. "Can you tell me what is blocking her memory?"

Poppy took out her wand and scanned Hermione. She frowned slightly and replied, "I don't know what spell was used. The scan shows that a part of her brain is blocked, the part where her memories are stored. Whoever did this was very exact. I don't believe that anyone could unblock her memories without destroying her mind."

Dumbledore debated whether he really needed Miss Granger alive, but he needed those memories. He needed to know who the powerful Witch or Wizard was. Poppy cleared her throat, bringing him out of his thoughts. "Sorry Poppy, I was lost in thought. Try to do what you can. We need to find out what happened. I can't have people just going around stunning my future teachers, now can I?" Dumbledore said with false kindness.

"Thank you, Headmaster," Hermione replied with a smile.

"You rest now. I'll talk to you later," he said and left the infirmary. He decided that he would visit young Miss Granger tonight and use Legilimency on her. If he happened to scramble her brain, well that would be a benefit. Having such an intelligent Witch around, even if she was blind to his true nature, could be dangerous. Miss Granger

saw too much. It would only be a matter of time before the nosy Witch saw something she shouldn't.

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She watched from her hidden spot in the infirmary. No one ever noticed the small quivering mouse. She was glad that she had seen Filch bringing in the unconscious young woman.

From her tower vantage point, she saw Filch crossing the grounds with someone in his arms. Once she realized who it was, she knew that whatever had happened to Hermione, she didn't want Dumbledore to know about it. The Magic was whispering a warning and she heeded it.

She quickly transformed and made her way to the Infirmary. When Minerva rushed to get Dumbledore, she stunned Poppy and cast a blocking spell on Miss Granger's memories. She didn't know what happened today. She just knew that she needed to hide the memories. She prayed that she'd hid them well enough. She revived Poppy, and then transformed into her animagus form and hid as she heard the Headmaster and Minerva returning.

She was grateful for the warning that the Magic had given her. She could feel the time for the inevitable confrontation between Light and Dark drawing closer. What part the young woman in the infirmary had to play, she didn't know, but Miss Granger was needed. She sighed, a chill creeping up her spine. She knew that things in the Wizarding World were going to come to a head soon. She had Seen it.

With one last look at Miss Granger, Trelawney scurried back to her tower.

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Night fell and the Infirmary was dark. The rest of the castle was quiet and the children were in bed, asleep. The shadowy figure silently made his way to the Infirmary. He opened the door carefully and walked in. He moved closer to the bed that Hermione was lying on and stared down at the sleeping Witch.

Glaring at the witch with contempt, Dumbledore entered her mind. He rummaged through her scattered memories, snorting with contempt at Miss Granger's dreams of becoming the Headmistress of Hogwarts. He wouldn't let some Mudblood become the Headmistress of Hogwarts. With the Elixir of Life that he had made from the Philosopher's Stone that he was to have destroyed in Harry's first year, he would be around for a long time. The Flamels had served their purpose, although he did miss the eyewitness accounts they provided about great Dark Lords of the past six-hundred years. He pushed past the memories of everyday life and continued to dig. Hermione moaned, a whimper of pain escaping, so Dumbledore cast a silencing spell on her. He ruthlessly dug further and deeper until he finally came to a set of memories surrounded by a barrier.

He gently touched the barrier and jumped as he felt a mind-numbing shock. With a growl, he looked the barrier over until he found a weak point. He began to chip away at it, not caring that the witch was trembling in pain. Her mouth was open in a silent scream and yet he continued to destroy the barrier, determined to get those memories regardless the consequences.

He almost yelled with joy as he broke through the barrier. He watched as Hermione followed the werewolf. He saw him confront an unknown man. The memory jumped and he saw Hermione frantically trying to bypass the spells that the Death Eaters had placed at the entrance of the alley. He frowned as Hermione stunned Bellatrix Lestrange and rushed over to check on Remus. A strange man walked into the alley and stunned Hermione. Dumbledore's face grew furious as he realized that the man was Ron Weasley. The redhead was more powerful than he had been at school. How? Ron had been an average student and Wizard while he was at Hogwarts. So why was he suddenly showing this power? Could this be the result of the Rite? Who was the mysterious man laying on the ground?

Dumbledore thought about it a moment and his eyes widened. "Sirius," he whispered coldly. The werewolf knew that Sirius was alive and that's why Remus confronted the mysterious man. Dumbledore growled angrily and Hermione convulsed on the bed with the force of his emotions. He disregarded her pain and continued sifting through

her memories. He snorted with contempt as he heard Ron try to convince Hermione of his true nature. The pathetic girl really was naïve, he thought with amusement as she defended him. "The betterment of the Wizarding World, my arse," he whispered, disgust written on his face.

Dumbledore frowned a moment. Something about the memories of Ron's interrogation troubled him. What was it? He sifted through the memories again and slowed them down. He looked through them more carefully before realizing that there was someone else in the alley with Ron. Who? Who was with him? Maybe it was Severus?

The Headmaster's eyes grew cold at the thought of the Potions Master. It made sense and it also explained where he had gone. Dumbledore frowned as he realized that Severus's interrogation of the house-elf was a set up. Rage built up in the Headmaster and his magic flared. Hermione began to convulse, her body trembling with pain. There was blood coming out of her nose and ears. Dumbledore quickly backed out of her mind, but before leaving it completely he was caught by a power of unknown origin.

"Your time will soon be over, Albus Dumbledore," the voice whispered softly. "Soon all will know of your misdeeds. Your true nature will be revealed and the Wizarding World will once again be free of your wrongdoings. Be warned Albus Dumbledore, this woman is under my protection."

The Magic held him tightly and caused him great pain before throwing him out of Hermione's mind completely. He took a step back and watched dazedly as Hermione's body glowed with a bright light. The blood from her nose and ears disappeared and the body stopped convulsing.

Swallowing hard at the mysterious events, he quickly left the room.

Trelawney transformed and walked over to Hermione's bed. She caressed her hair softly and said, "Now, you know. The Magic has protected you. You are still useful to her. Use the information you have received to help those you have betrayed. Know this though, you may be forgiven, but you will never know what you once had."

She looked down into the pained brown-eyes and smiled gently. "There are many things that will be coming to a head soon. You will need to choose where you will be when the time comes. I left you some information in your room, behind the portrait of the roses. Read it; we will talk when I visit you again."

Hermione's eyes fluttered shut and she fell back into sleep. Her work done, Trelawney, also known as Vates, transformed into a mouse and made her way back to her tower.

She never saw the two people standing in the shadows. They hid when they saw the Headmaster standing over to Hermione's bed. They had come for a late night visit. There had been a message letting them know that Hermione was in the Infirmary, when they had arrived home from abroad. They looked at each other and nodded. They quickly left the castle and apparated back to Neville's apartment. They sat on the couch, going over what they had seen that night.

Luna looked over at Neville and said, "Things are getting strange around here. I didn't like the looks of the Headmaster. He seemed to be causing Hermione pain."

Neville nodded. "Neither did I. As for Trelawney, that too was strange. I noticed she didn't seem as flaky as normal. I'm not even sure who to talk to about this," he replied softly.

Luna murmured an agreement. "Maybe we should ask Trelawney."

"You think?" Neville asked, surprised.

"I think there is more to Trelawney than meets the eye."

Neville frowned thoughtfully before agreeing. He sighed gustily. "It's times like this that I miss Harry and Ron."

Luna laughed softly. "Then I suggest we find them," she said.

Neville looked hesitant before nodding. "Yes, let's do that. I miss my friends. I miss Harry and I think he should know that we are with him. He needs to know that we didn't betray him."

Luna looked at him sadly. "Sure, but you know we'll have to get past Ron first. We didn't exactly help him last year."

Neville sighed heavily. "I know, but he wouldn't accept our help. He wouldn't accept anyone's help."

"True."

Neville looked over at his girlfriend, a frown on his face. "We just need to know where to find them."

Luna's gaze went dreamy and her voice floated through the room softly. "He is with the Grim, the Wolf, the Snake, and the small Warrior. He is protected by his brother."

Neville looked at her, confused. He knew that Luna saw things that others didn't. She had been teased during her years at school for her strange behavior. Loony had been a cruel nickname the other students gave her. She never seemed to mind though. Neville personally thought that Luna was touched by the Magic. She saw things that only she could comprehend. Neville knew that whenever she saw something, he needed to listen.

Now he needed to figure out who the Grim, the Wolf, the Snake, and the small Warrior were. He had the feeling that the brother was Ron, so who were the others? Where in the hell was Harry?

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Hermione's eyes fluttered open and she gazed out into the darkened Infirmary. She trembled as she remembered what had happened yesterday. She remembered how she had defended the Headmaster from Ron's accusations; she had been so certain that Ron was wrong and she was right. After all, Ron hadn't been the brightest bulb at Hogwarts. She had been so secure in her knowledge that she was always right.

She choked on a sob. She remembered the pain of Dumbledore's rape -- the rape of her mind. She lay there, crying as she realized that

everything she knew was gone. Her world had been torn asunder. She didn't know what to believe.

She had believed Dumbledore when he had told her that Harry was guilty of murder. She looked at the facts, not at her friendship with Harry. She had believed when Dumbledore told her that he was trying to help Ron and Harry; that he was trying to protect them. She believed him when he said he was helping the Wizarding World become a better place. She had believed anything and everything that he had said.

Putting her face into the pillow, she screamed with rage, pain, and hurt. She had believed him and everything he'd ever told her was lie. She remembered as he dug through her memories, her body convulsing in pain. She remembered as she felt his lack of concern for her welfare -- his coldness, his malice. She remembered his rage at Ron's newfound power. She remembered his hate for Ron. She remembered everything that he did to her, all the pain that he had caused her.

She also remembered the voice that she had heard in her head, the one that had thrown the Headmaster out of her mind, the one that had soothed her and healed her. It had been powerful and it surrounded her. It had allowed her to remember all that had happened. It had ripped the blinders off her eyes and it had destroyed her innocence and naiveté. It had made her look outside herself to realize that there was more going on in the world than her all consuming need for knowledge.

She had destroyed friendships with her need to be the smartest person in the Wizarding World. She realized that she was never going to get Ron and Harry's friendship back. As Trelawney said, and boy wasn't that a surprise, they may forgive her, but they will never forget. Things were not going to go back to the way they were.

She needed to find a way to make it right, a way to help them. They were in danger from the Headmaster. She just needed to prove herself to them. Make them realize that she knew that they were right, that they had always been right. It made her flinch as she remembered her self-righteous attitude. She cringed as she

remembered turning her back on Harry and destroying her friendship with Ron. There had been a time when they were becoming more, but that was destroyed in the wake of her betrayal of Harry.

Hermione closed her eyes and sighed. She would worry about this later. She needed to sleep, and then she would find a way to help her friends, even if they didn't care for her anymore. She would find a way to make the Headmaster pay for raping her mind and killing her innocence. Her need for knowledge was finally going to come in handy. She vowed that the Headmaster would be destroyed or she would die trying.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

"No," Harry said sternly.

"But..."

"I said no! Dobby would kill me, then you. I'm not going to have a deranged house-elf after me because I disobeyed him."

"Damn it, Harry. It's been four days since I was attacked. I feel fine. Severus said I was fine and there is nothing wrong with me. I should be allowed to get up," Sirius whined.

"I'm sure, but until Dobby thinks you're fine, I'm not interfering one bit. Dobby is scary when he's angry," Harry replied solemnly.

Sirius leaned back against his pillows, crossed his arms, and pouted. "I don't see why I have to obey a house-elf. He's not my father," he grumbled.

Harry snorted and asked, "When did you ever obey your Father? You know as well as I do that if you move from that bed before he says you can, you'd get a spanking like never before."

Sirius grunted, still pouting. "It's not like it was my fault that I was attacked by Death Eaters," he whined.

"Yes, Padfoot, I know," Harry replied soothingly, his face amused. "Regardless, you still can't leave that bed until Dobby lets you. Now, buck up and stop pouting," he said with a grin.

Sirius sighed heavily. "Fine. How are your lessons going?" he asked.

Harry grimaced, annoyed. "They're going slow. I can do several spells using wandless magic, but I'm only on third year level. The more difficult the spell, the harder it is to control. Ron has control of his magic and he's doing better, but somehow, I seem to be blocked. I'm not sure why," he said, irritated.

"Don't worry, Harry. You'll get it. Before long, you'll have a handle on your magic and you'll be doing wandless magic left and right."

"Maybe, but will it be in time? I have Voldemort to face, not to mention a psychotic Headmaster. If I can't get control of my magic before then, no amount of power is going to help me."

Sirius looked at his godson intently. He could see the worry and stress on the young man's face. Harry was too young to look that old, that worn. He knew that Azkaban was partly to blame, but he knew how worried Harry was that he wouldn't be ready for Voldemort and Dumbledore.

Sirius reached up, grabbed his godson, and pulled him down on the bed. He lifted Harry's face to make sure that he was looking him in the eyes. "You'll get it, Harry. You'll learn what you need to know. Also, you're not alone. You have Ron, Severus, and me to help you, not to mention a slightly deranged house-elf that could probably kick Dumbledore's arse if you let him," he said with a grin.

Harry snickered at the comment. "I should let Dobby take care of Dumbledore. He's still pissed about Winky's death."

"I would give anything to see the Headmaster flying into the wall," Sirius said wistfully.

Harry laughed. "Maybe you should have Severus show you his memory of that. I think I have a Pensieve around here somewhere."

Harry stopped a moment before his eyes widened. He remembered the Pensieves that he took out of his vault. With everything happening, he totally forgot about them. Making a mental note to check them out when he had the chance, he looked over at his godfather and smothered a smile at the bored look on the man's face. Dobby refused to let Sirius move from his bed. He had been adamant that Sirius was going to rest and get better before he left the bed. Sirius didn't take him seriously and tried to get out of bed only to find himself back in it. Apparently, Dobby knew Sirius well and warded the bed to keep him there. Sirius had been angry and he let everyone know it.

"How's Remus?" Sirius asked suddenly. He'd been angry when he found out that they'd brought Remus back to the castle. He calmed down some when he realized that Dumbledore would more than likely interrogate Remus for his actions against Hermione and then kill him because he knew Sirius was alive.

Harry scowled and shrugged. "I don't know. Dobby takes care of him. Gets him books to read and feeds him. I haven't had the urge to visit the bastard. He may have helped Ron, but I'm still angry with him," he replied, his eyes cold.

Sirius nodded with understanding. He told Harry what Remus had said about blaming Harry for his death and Harry had been shocked, dismayed and hurt. Once Sirius found out that Harry already blamed himself, he was even angrier with Remus for his attitude. Ron pointed out that though the man was a fool for blaming Harry, maybe there was something to the fact that Remus's inner wolf was mad with grief for the loss of his Pack. They should take into consideration that Remus is a werewolf and some things were instinct, whether they liked it or not. Though it made some sense to them, they were still angry with Remus for his betrayal. It just wasn't right for him to turn on Harry, instinct or not.

"You think I should visit him when Dobby lets me go?" Sirius asked.

Harry shrugged. "You do what you want with him. I don't care."

Sirius frowned slightly. He knew that Harry was angry with Remus and he understood it, but he wondered if maybe he should encourage Harry to forgive the man. Sirius sighed; he hated trying to be responsible. Before he could say anything to Harry, Dobby popped in and looked at him. He gave him an intense look before smiling.

"Mutt, you seem to be doing better. I'm allowing you to get up from the bed," Dobby said.

Sirius whooped for joy and waited as Dobby took down the wards. He got out of bed and did a happy dance of glee around the room. He

stopped and looked over at Harry. "Do you think Severus will let me help you with your lessons?"

Harry snickered and replied, "I'm sure he will, but Ron and I have something to do today."

Sirius looked at him curiously and asked, "What?"

Harry smiled mischievously. "We're going to see someone about a meeting."

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Lizzie Cameron looked up at the knock on her door. "Enter," she called out.

The door opened and a man entered the room. He looked around the room and his gaze fell on her. "Um...are you Elizabeth Cameron?" he asked hesitantly.

Lizzie looked at the man warily. The man was tall, around 6'1" with long auburn hair. His eyes were a crystal blue and he had freckles on his face. He was looked harmless, but Lizzie was still wary of any strangers.

"Yes, I am," she replied.

The man looked relieved. "Oh good, I was afraid I got the wrong room."

"How can I help you?" she asked.

"I'm here to deliver a package," he said cheerfully.

"A package? Do you know who it's from?" she asked cautiously.

The man shook his head. "No, Ma'am. I just deliver them."

"I see. Well, if you could give me the package, I need to get back to work," Lizzie stated crisply.

"Oh...uh...okay," the man stuttered, obviously flustered by her the tone of her voice. He pulled a small package out of his pocket and, with a smirk, threw it at her. "Here, catch," he said.

Instinctively she grabbed the package and cursed mentally as she felt the sensation of a portkey.

The stranger watched as Lizzie disappeared. "Well, she's not going to be happy," he said with a grin. He turned and left the room. In the hallway, he saw someone and stopped to wait. The man stopped in front of him and grinned. "Did everything go alright?" he asked.

Harry chuckled and said, "Oh yeah, but I can tell you right now, she's not going to be happy. She reminds me of McGonagall. She's going to be a tad irate. How did it go with Percy?"

Ron chuckled. "He was quite irate. Of course, I didn't give him a choice in the matter," he said with a grin.

Harry laughed. "I guess we should get back. I just hope Dobby doesn't have to um...calm them down."

Ron started to chuckle at the image that popped through his head. "Oh, this is going to be so much fun."

They started to laugh as they made their way out of the Ministry building.

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Lizzie looked around the room that she had been portkeyed in. It was a nice, cozy room with very large windows but no doorway. There was a beautiful view of the gardens and the forest. She cursed loudly at her stupidity. She knew better than to take anything from a stranger. A loud crash startled her out of her thoughts, and she turned around quickly to see Percy lying on the floor.

She rushed over to her friend and helped him up from the floor. "Percy, are you all right?" she asked, concerned.

Percy looked at her, surprised on his face. "Lizzie? What are you doing here? What's going on?" he asked.

Lizzie frowned, annoyed. "I was stupid. A man came into my office to deliver a package. I wasn't thinking when he threw the thing at me. I tried to catch it and was portkeyed here. You?" she asked.

Percy sighed and replied, "Same thing."

"Did you recognize the man?" she asked.

Percy shook his head. "No, he was a stranger. He just came in and told me to catch. Like you, I tried to catch the stupid thing."

They heard a pop and looked around. A house-elf was smiling at them. "Would you like anything to eat or drink?" he inquired.

Lizzie glared at him. "I would like to know what's going on. I demand you tell me where we are," she growled.

The house-elf chuckled and replied, "I'm afraid that I can't do that. You will just have to wait until your host gets here. In the mean time, I am here to offer you my services. Would you like some tea perhaps?"

"Listen, you pesky little house-elf, I demand to know what the hell is going on," Lizzie demanded.

The house-elf eyes narrowed and he replied coldly, "And I told you that I can't tell you. Now, if you don't want anything, I'll be leaving you. You'll just have to wait until the master of the castle gets here. For the last time, do you want anything?"

Lizzie and Percy blinked at the house-elf's attitude. This was not the normal mild and meek house-elf. Lizzie cleared her throat nervously, sighed wearily, and replied, "Sure, let's have some tea. And maybe some finger sandwiches. I haven't had lunch yet today. How about you, Percy?" she asked.

Percy shrugged. "That's fine."

The house-elf nodded and disappeared. Lizzie looked over at Percy and asked, "Was it just me or was that house-elf a little um..."

"Assertive?" Percy replied blandly.

"Sure, but I was going to say scary," Lizzie smirked.

The house-elf popped back in with the tea and looked over at Lizzie. "Thank you, I try to be." He walked over to the small table and placed the silver tray on it. He looked over at them and smiled. "If you need anything else, just call for Sage."

"Is that your name?" Percy asked.

The house-elf chuckled. "No, I'm someone totally different." With that said, the house-elf disappeared.

Lizzie snickered. "That's for sure. Well, I guess we should have some tea and wait until our host arrives."

Percy muttered to himself, his face irritated. He walked over to the table, poured himself some tea, and grabbed a couple of sandwiches. He sat down in the chair and proceeded to eat. Lizzie chuckled at her friend's annoyance and made her way over to the table.

Thirty minutes later, a hidden door opened and two men walked into the room. Lizzie glared at the man who threw the portkey at her. The man smiled at her and Lizzie growled with frustration.

"What the hell is going on? Where am I? Who are you?" she demanded.

The men took out their wands and muttered something. Lizzie watched in warily as the men standing in front of her changed. She bit back a gasp of shock as she recognized Harry Potter and Ron Black.

"What is going on?" she asked plaintively.

"Ronnie!" Percy yelled. "Damn it! Couldn't you have just told me what was going on instead of throwing that damn portkey at me?" he demanded, irritated.

Ron chuckled. "Where would be the fun in that? You should've seen the look on your face. It was hysterical."

Percy growled at him and Harry watched them, his face amused. He looked over at Lizzie and saw her watching him intently. He smiled at her and she relaxed. There was a look of severe displeasure on her face, reminding him of McGonagall once again.

He walked over to Lizzie and held out his hand. "You must be Lizzie Cameron. I'm Harry Potter. It's nice to meet you," he said cheerfully.

Lizzie scowled at him and took his hand. "You too, though I would've preferred a different way of being introduced," she retorted archly.

Harry grinned at her. "You never know who is watching in the Ministry. I decided to give you no chance of warning anyone. I don't trust you yet, Miss Cameron. I haven't decided whether or not you have anything I need."

"Harry," Percy began, but Lizzie held up her hand to silence him.

"It's all right, Percy. I understand where Mr. Potter is coming from. Sadly, you don't know who to trust anymore. Irritated as I am about being portkeyed out of my office, I do understand the security measures. I wouldn't put it past Dumbledore to have me watched. The man doesn't trust me and with good reason. I know exactly what type of man he is and I have no qualms about letting people know. Unfortunately, they don't actually believe me. Many say it's the rambling of a bitter woman," Lizzie explained sadly.

Harry nodded with understanding. "You have my attention, Miss Cameron. Let's see if you have anything to say that is worth my time. I take it Dobby has taken care of your needs?" he inquired.

"If he was that rather scary house-elf, then yes, he took care of us," Lizzie said.

Harry and Ron chuckled. "Yes, Dobby is rather um...aggressive when he needs to be."

"I've never seen a house-elf act the way he does, or even speak the way he does. Why is that?" Lizzie asked curiously.

Harry shrugged. "Simple, Dobby is free."

Lizzie blinked rapidly a moment before commenting, "Being free causes that reaction?" she asked.

Harry looked at her seriously. "It can. Being free does a lot to a house-elf. You'd be surprised by what it can do. Dobby is not our slave or our servant; he is our friend. He helps us because he chooses too. He's part of my family and he's involved in our decision-making. In fact, he will be part of our little meeting today. Dobby has a certain," Harry paused a moment before grinning, "disregard for Dumbledore. He will be involved in whatever we do. Besides, who would ever suspect a house-elf?" Harry asked.

Lizzie looked thoughtful. She nodded her head slowly and said, "That makes a bit of sense. House-elves are so common and everyday that normal Witches and Wizards don't ever notice them. They would make the perfect spy. Very interesting."

"Dobby," Harry called.

Dobby appeared before them and grinned at Harry. "Yes, Harry?" he asked.

"Could you find Severus and Sirius?" he requested. "I need you all here for the meeting."

"Of course, Harry. I might have to drag the Professor out of the lab. He has been playing with his potions again," Dobby said indulgently.

Harry laughed and replied, "Just be careful then. You know how he gets when someone disturbs him."

Dobby sniffed and said, "I'm not scared of him." With a smirk, he disappeared.

Harry smiled as he prepared some tea. He looked over at Ron and asked, "Do you want a cup?" Ron shook his head and Harry walked over to the small loveseat and sat down. He sipped his tea and watched as Percy and Ron made small talk.

Harry looked up as he heard the door open. Sirius and Severus walked into the room and paused as they saw Lizzie and Percy sitting on the couch. Severus looked over at Harry with a question in his eyes and Harry shrugged. They walked farther into the room and took a seat. Dobby popped into the room, walked over to the small footstool, and sat down. Harry took a sip of his tea and put the teacup down on the table. He leaned back in loveseat and looked over at Lizzie.

"Now that we're all here, I would like to make some introductions for those of you who do not know everyone. Sitting on the couch is Percy Weasley and Lizzie Cameron, who are part of the Watchers group. Sitting in the chair to my left is Severus Snape, Potions Master. Sitting next to me on the loveseat is Sirius Black, ex-prisoner of Azkaban and former Auror. Sitting on the footstool is Dobby, house-elf extraordinaire, and sitting in the chair by the couch is Ron Black, formally a Weasley and my brother. And I am Harry Potter, Boy Who Lived, the Wizarding World's Savior, ex-Azkaban prisoner, and the one who is going to kick Voldemort's arse," Harry said dramatically.

Ron snickered. "Now you're starting to sound like Percy, a pompous windbag."

"Hey," Percy yelled, annoyed.

Harry laughed. "Now that everyone knows who everyone is, let's get started," he said cheerfully.

He looked at Lizzie and asked, "What can the Watchers do for me that I can't do on my own or with the help of my friends?"

"Probably nothing, but we can give you any support that you might need. We are admittedly a small group, consisting of around fifty to sixty members. The members have jobs in the Ministry, the Order of the Phoenix, and at Hogwarts. The Watchers have been watching Dumbledore for over the last fifty years," Lizzie explained.

Harry interrupted her. "If the Watchers have been watching him for so long, then why hasn't there been anything done before now? Surely, you could've found some sort of evidence on the Headmaster? Evil can't exist that long without someone seeing something. I'm beginning to think that the Watchers may be ineffective."

Lizzie glared at Harry. "Dumbledore has covered his tracks quite well. If there was any evidence, someone always destroyed it before we could use it. Dumbledore has no qualms about killing someone to hide the evidence of his wrongdoings."

"Again, where is the evidence that Dumbledore is doing the killing? Are you sure that it's Dumbledore that is doing these things? Couldn't it be someone else?" Harry asked casually.

Lizzie opened her mouth then shut it, frustrated. "I have no proof. I can show you a list of supposed actions that Dumbledore has done, but there is no proof. There is only hearsay and depositions from people who are too frightened to come forward. Half of those wouldn't be good witnesses as their testimonies could be construed as saving their own arses," Lizzie explained.

Harry frowned at her, his expression confused. "What do you mean?"

"Half of the witnesses are from Knockturn Alley. They are the dredges of Society who have their own illegal doings to hide. Several of the witnesses are people who did the dirty work for the Headmaster. After they gave their disposition, they disappeared or they died under mysterious circumstances. We can't even get into Dumbledore's accounts at Gringotts to find out if he has paid someone for illegal doings. It's very frustrating when you know someone is doing something wrong, and there isn't a damn thing you can do about it. Everyone believes that Dumbledore is a kind,

benevolent man, but they can't see past his mask to see what he is really like. They don't want to see it," Lizzie said with scowl.

Harry looked at her thoughtfully. "So, why do you need my help? What makes you think that I can help you anymore than anyone else?" he asked.

Lizzie smiled at him. "Your Grandfather was a member of the Watchers group."

Harry's eyes widened at that comment. He leaned forward eagerly and asked, "What about my father?"

Lizzie shook her head. "He died before we could approach him. I'm sad to say that I'm not sure if he would've believed us or not. I had a hard time convincing your Grandfather, but once I did, he was one of our best agents."

Harry chewed on his lip in thought. "While that's nice to know, I still don't see what you need me for."

"Before your Grandfather died, he owed me to let me know that he finally found what the Watchers were looking for. He found the evidence we needed to put Dumbledore away. He also found evidence of a new plan of Dumbledore's. He didn't go into detail, but he owed me to let me know that he was going to hide the evidence so that Dumbledore couldn't get it. He was afraid that Dumbledore had found out about him. Two days after I got the owl, William was murdered. Dumbledore blamed it on Voldemort, but the Watchers knew better. Dumbledore had found out that William was an agent and he had him killed. It is not known whether he killed William himself or had someone else do it," Lizzie explained.

Harry stared at her, shocked. "Are you saying that Dumbledore murdered my Grandfather?" he asked in disbelief. Lizzie nodded her head sadly. "I suppose there is no proof of that?" he asked sarcastically.

"Unfortunately, there isn't. After William was murdered, I received a letter via Gringotts. William hid the evidence in the family vault where

only his Heir could find it. The Watchers were relieved that the evidence was safe, but upset that no one could get to it. James, while old enough, was too far under Dumbledore's thumb to be of any use. As I said before, he was killed before he could be approached," Lizzie said as she took a sip of her tea.

"Did my Grandfather say what the evidence was?" Harry asked.

Lizzie shook her head. "No. All he wrote was that only his Heir could retrieve it. The Watchers debated whether to approach you several years ago, but at that time, you were under Dumbledore's control. I have to admit that I was relieved to see you break away from Dumbledore with the supposed death of Black. We decided to approach you, but that's when the Malfoys framed you for murder and had you thrown into Azkaban. There was even talk about breaking you out of Azkaban, but, in actuality, we could do nothing. I must say that it was fortunate that the Aurors captured the Malfoys when they did. You gave us quite a stir when you disappeared."

Harry snickered. "Yes, well I wasn't exactly comfortable where I was."

"I have a question," Sirius stated.

Harry looked over at Sirius with a question in his eyes. "What is it, Padfoot?"

"How is Harry supposed to find the evidence if he doesn't know what he is looking for?" Sirius asked. "I've been in the Potter vault, and you can be damn sure that it's going to be hard to find anything in there. That place is huge and there are many things in there. Finding something that we know nothing about might be a problem," Sirius explained.

Harry nodded his head. "I agree. Ron and I were there not too long ago. We were looking for something and we were lucky to find it since we had only very vague reference to what we needed. There are lots of chests, boxes, and even furniture that could hide it."

Lizzie frowned thoughtfully. "No, it would have to be something that only the Heir of the Potter line could get into. That's what the letter

William sent to me said. He said, and I quote, 'I have left it in the vault so that it may only be retrieved by the blood of the Potter Heir. No one else may do so.' So, wherever it's hidden it can only be retrieved by Harry," she explained.

Ron sat up suddenly and looked over at Harry, his eyes wide. "Harry, the shields," he blurted out.

Harry looked at him a moment before his eyes widened. "Of course! That makes sense. It's not only the fact that I'm the Potter heir, but that in order to get it you have to use the blood of the Heir. The Pensieves!" he exclaimed. He looked at Ron, his face excited. "I've had it this whole time and I never even knew it. I could've had something on that old man weeks ago if I had just remembered that I took them from the vault."

Severus scowled at them. "If you would be so kind as to explain it to the rest of us, we would appreciate it."

Harry looked over at him and grinned. "The Potter vault is protected by a magical shield that can only be opened by the blood of a Potter. Most of the Old Pureblood vaults are like this. I'm sure your vaults have that same options, correct?" Harry asked and Severus nodded his head. "When Ron and I went to my vault, Ron found a niche that was protected by the same type of shield. In the niche were two Pensieves. The shield was also protecting these Pensieves. I can get rid of the shield, but it would take a drop or two of my blood, the Potter Heir. That's what my Grandfather meant. The evidence that the Watchers need are in those Pensieves," Harry explained. "I've had them in my bottomless bag since my visit to the vault. I forgot all about them until today."

Lizzie squealed with excitement. "Merlin, do you know what this means? We are one step closer to getting rid of Dumbledore. Can you get the Pensieves, Harry?" she asked.

Harry looked at her and smiled grimly. "I could, but I'm not. Not now."

Lizzie looked at him in shocked disbelief. "Why not?" she demanded.

"I still haven't heard anything about the Watchers that I can't do on my own. You have to understand, I don't trust the Ministry. I don't trust those who work in the Ministry. Everyone has his or her own agenda; I'm debating whether your agenda coincides with mine. If the evidence is good enough, I'll have what I need to get rid of Dumbledore. I'll be looking it over to find out. Here's what I want from you. I want to talk to your boss. If they want my help, then I want to know whom I would be working for. If I'm going to put my life and the lives of my friends on the line, then I want their identity. If that is unacceptable, then the Watchers group will find themselves on the sidelines. I have no reason to trust anything you have to tell me. I don't know you from Adam. As far as I know, Dumbledore could head your little Watchers group. So talk to your boss and I'll owl you in a couple of days for your response. If I don't like what I hear, then I'll go it alone," Harry said firmly.

Lizzie gaped at Harry. She couldn't believe what she was hearing. Harry was supposed to help her. He was supposed to ask for help from the Watchers. Instead, he was changing the game plan and in turn, the Watchers were going to have to ask him for help. The Watchers were going to have to prove themselves to Harry, or else Harry would tell them to go to Hell. Lizzie sat there a moment before she began to laugh.

"I can see why Voldemort and Dumbledore have problems when it comes to you, Harry. Very well, I'll talk to my boss. I don't know who heads the Watchers, but I'll give my superiors your message. You can owl me in a couple of days," she said with a small grin.

Harry silently heaved a sigh of relief. He hadn't been sure his little gamble was going to work. He had been sure that Lizzie was going to tell him to go to Hell. While he may have the supposed evidence that the Watchers needed, Harry still needed their help. He was just curious as to how far he could push them before they pushed back. In this case, the gamble got him the opportunity to meet the Head of the Watchers. He was quite curious as to who it would be.

"Actually, I'll have Dobby come to you. I trust him more than an owl. He'll be able to disable any tracking spells that someone might place

on the owl I send. As I said, I don't trust anyone beside my friends," Harry said.

Lizzie nodded her head in understanding. She looked over at Sirius and asked, "If things work out and Harry agrees to work with us, would you like to testify against Dumbledore?"

"Oh hell, yes!" Sirius replied with a cold smile. "I owe that bastard something and if I can help in any small way to take him down, then I'm all for it."

Harry and Ron snickered at Sirius while Severus just rolled his eyes. "Tell me, Miss Cameron, you have a spy in the Order, do you not? Do you have any in the Dark Lord's ranks?" Severus asked.

"We do have a spy in the Order, but no Death Eater spies, Mr. Snape. Why?" Lizzie asked curiously.

"What is the news on the Dark Lord? How are things progressing on that front? Have any Death Eaters been captured recently? We've been so concerned with the Headmaster recently that we haven't really paid attention to the Dark Lord. We don't get out much and we haven't heard anything lately," Severus explained.

Lizzie frowned thoughtfully. "There isn't really a lot going on right now. There was a raid about a week ago. It seems that You Know Who was very angry about something and he destroyed a small Muggle village. Other than that, he has actually been quiet. There was an incident where three Death Eaters were captured, but no one is taking credit for that," Lizzie explained. Ron looked smug at that and Harry just grinned.

Lizzie gave them a knowing look. "I find it rather odd that he has been so quite lately. The Order is uneasy. It is thought that he is planning something big, but since you disappeared, the Order has no way to confirm that," she explained.

"Well, that doesn't sound good," Harry said with a frown. His scar hadn't been acting up, since he could now block Voldemort from his mind. He wondered if maybe he should try to see what he was up to.

With Severus no longer spying, there wasn't really a way to find out what they needed to know. He chewed on his lip thoughtfully.

"No, Harry. I won't allow it," Severus said with a glare.

Harry was startled out of his thoughts and he looked up at Severus, surprised. "What?"

"Whatever stupid Gryffindor thing you have planned, I won't allow it. You can get that thought right out your mind," Severus said.

"But..." Harry began.

"No! If you even think about doing it, I'll give you so many detentions, your children will be serving them," Severus said harshly.

"Hey!" Harry exclaimed indignantly. "I'm no longer in school."

Severus crossed his arms and glared at Harry. "And that concerns me, how?" he asked sarcastically.

Harry leaned back in the loveseat and grumbled, "I don't know how you knew what I was planning."

Severus snorted, annoyed. "I don't know exactly what you are planning, but I was your teacher for almost seven years. I can tell when you're going to do something stupid."

"Whatever," Harry pouted. He heard Ron snicker and glared at him.

Severus turned to Ron and scowled. "What are you laughing about? Knowing you, you would be right in the middle of it."

"Hey! I was just sitting here. I didn't do anything," Ron exclaimed.

The rest of the adults cracked up and Harry grinned. It was true that whatever stupid plan Harry was even thinking about doing, Ron would be right in the middle of it. He knew that he could count on his brother to help him.

"As much fun as this is, I really think Percy and I need to get back to the Ministry. I don't want to stay away any longer. People might get suspicious," Lizzie said.

Harry nodded and looked at Dobby. "If you would be so kind, I would appreciate it if you took them back."

"Of course, Harry." Dobby got off the stool and walked over to Lizzie and Percy. He waited as they stood up. Lizzie looked over at Harry and said, "It was a pleasure to meet you, Harry Potter. I hope that we can work together in the future."

"We'll see."

Percy looked at him and smiled uneasily. "Harry, I...ah..." he began.

Harry shook his head, a smile on his face. "I understand, Percy. I may not have liked it, but I do understand why you treated me as you did. I hope that in the future we'll have more time to talk. Not just for me, but for Ron too. He's my brother now and I'm glad that at least one Weasley didn't turn against him."

Percy shrugged and replied, "He's my brother, regardless. As are you. I'd like to have the opportunity to talk though."

Harry nodded. "I'll contact you and we'll get together. Until then, Percy."

Percy and Lizzie said their goodbyes and Dobby took their hands and disappeared. The room was quiet for a moment before Harry looked over at Ron. "Now that they're gone, let's go check out those Pensieves. I'm curious to see what got my Grandfather killed. What was it that Dumbledore didn't want anyone to know? What was this plan that he started?"

Ron shrugged and said, "Not sure, but whatever it is, I'm pretty sure that Dumbledore doesn't want it to get out."

Severus smiled coldly. "Well, then in that case, it's our duty to find out what it is."

They chuckled and raced out of the room and up the stairs, eager to find out what William had hidden all those years ago.

CHAPTER TWENTY- SIX

Harry entered into his bedroom and walked over to the small snake painting on the wall, hissing at it. The painting moved aside to show a small square hole. Harry reached in and pulled out a bag. He hissed at the painting again and it moved to cover the hole. With a sigh of satisfaction, Harry turned and looked at Ron, Severus and Sirius, who had followed him.

Ron looked at the bag and then back at the painting before glancing up at Harry. "I guess no one would ever find your bag, would they?" Ron asked, amused.

Harry grinned. "Why do you think I use the snake painting? I don't want just anyone to get into my secret hiding place."

"What about us?" Sirius asked with a pout. "Don't you trust us?" He had a sorrowful look on his face, his eyes wide with mock hurt.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yes, Padfoot, I trust you three. If you ever need money or if you need to hide something so that no one else can get to it, you can use my little hiding spot. The password is Susie." Harry smirked at Ron, who began to laugh.

Looking down at the bag, Harry frowned a little. "Maybe we should go back down to the den for this. We'll need to be comfortable before we go start going through the memories."

Sirius looked eager. "I don't think I can wait that long. Let's transfigure some cushions and sit on the floor."

Severus snorted. "I'm a little too old to be sitting on the floor. I think you can wait the few minutes it will take to go downstairs to the den, don't you?" he asked sarcastically.

Sirius crossed his arms and pouted. "If I have to," he said with an indignant sniff.

Harry shook his head at his godfather's antics and walked to the bedroom door. "Well, I'm going to get comfortable while visiting the

Pensieves. You guys can do what you want," Harry smirked before walking out of the bedroom.

Sirius looked at the bedroom door and back over to Severus. "You know, that boy is getting a little too big for his britches. I'm tempted to spank him," he said, irritated.

Severus looked thoughtful before sighing regretfully. "I agree, but if we did that, he would get even with us. He is the son of a Marauder."

Ron smirked. "Let's not forget that he also should've been a Slytherin and he is more powerful than the three of us. He may not hurt us, but he would definitely humiliate us."

Sirius pouted. "Fine, I guess we should go to the den." Sirius turned, walked out of the bedroom, grumbling the whole time.

Severus looked over at Ron with a smirk. "I don't think Harry is the one that needs the spanking."

Ron laughed as he followed Severus out of the bedroom.

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Harry sat the Pensieves down on the table. He looked at them thoughtfully and wondered what he was going to find. The fact that Dumbledore killed his grandfather made Harry angry. He also realized that he only had Miss Cameron's word on it. While Dumbledore was many things, Harry still had a hard time believing that he was a murderer. The thought that bothered him most was; if Dumbledore killed his grandfather, then did he have anything to do with his parents death?

Could he have killed them and blamed it on Voldemort? He didn't want to believe that, but so many things he thought were true wound up being false, and Dumbledore was in the middle of it all.

Harry looked up as Sirius walked into the room. He sat down on the couch and looked at Harry curiously. "So, what do you think you're going to find?"

Harry shrugged. "I'm not sure. The Pensieves might not even have anything pertaining to Dumbledore in them. They could all be memories from my grandfather. Even if it is, it's still important to me. I like the thought of having something that belonged to my grandfather."

"Surely they have something important in them. Why else would they be protected by the shield?" Ron asked as he walked into the room, followed by Severus. He sat down in the armchair by the fireplace.

"I'm not saying there's nothing important in here, but they could also be a decoy," Harry explained.

"But why?" Ron asked. "There is no way that anyone but you can get into the vault. It's protected by a shield that can only be gotten through with your blood."

"True, but what if my grandfather was worried that Dumbledore would use my father somehow? If James was as under his thumb as they say he was, then Dumbledore could've used him if he hadn't died," Harry said.

Sirius shook his head. "I agree that James respected Dumbledore, he didn't know any different, but he wouldn't have taken him to the family vault. That is personal and it's not shared with anyone but family."

"And if he had no choice?" Harry asked archly.

Severus frowned thoughtfully. "I think you're over analyzing the situation. Look into the Pensieves and find out what is in there. Then you'll know for sure," he said.

Harry sighed. "You're right. I'm starting to over think everything." He looked at the Pensieves in front of him and frowned. Deciding it probably didn't matter which one he started with, he grabbed one and pulled it towards him. Looking up at Sirius, he said, "I need a knife or something sharp."

Sirius transfigured one of the pillows lying on the couch and handed it to Harry. Harry took it and nodded his thanks. He slowly cut his finger and winced at the pain. He laid down the knife and held his finger over the Pensieve. A large drop of blood fell from his finger and landed on the shield. There was a bright flash and the shield disappeared. He healed his finger and took a steadying breath. He was nervous at what he would find. He looked over at Ron, Sirius, and Severus and asked, "You guys want to come?"

They came over to the table and sat down on the floor. They looked at each other a little warily and with a deep breath, they entered the Pensieve.

They were standing in a large room. There were large windows that faced a lovely view of a lake. There was a fire in the fireplace and the logs were popping softly. Harry turned around as the door to the room opened. A little boy of about four ran into the room, followed by a harried blonde woman.

"James, stop!" the woman yelled. The little boy ran around the room, making sure to stay out of the range of the woman. He giggled as he hid behind a large armchair. He peeked around to grin at the woman, his face bright and cheerful. His messy black hair was short and his hazel eyes were glittering with mischief.

"James, you come out from behind that chair now. You need to take your bath. Minsky has the tub filled," the woman said sternly.

"No!" James yelled. "Me don't like bafs," he said with a pout.

A tall man entered the room, stopped as he saw the woman and child in the room. Harry could see him size up the situation and grin at the little boy. "What is my son doing hiding behind the chair?" he asked cheerfully. The man was tall, with the same messy black hair and hazel eyes as his son. Harry grinned as he realized that his hair was definitely a Potter family trait. Harry looked at the man he now knew was his grandfather. Merlin, he took after him as well. He could see the definite family resemblance.

"Your son doesn't want to take a bath," the woman said, exasperated.

"No, mum, me no like bafs," James said with a stamp of his foot.

William chuckled as he walked over to the chair and picked up his son. "Miriam, why don't you get things ready and I'll bring James up to you in a moment," he said with a grin.

Miriam rolled her blue eyes and replied, "All right William, but you had better not forget this time."

William looked at her in mock shock. "Would I do that?" he asked.

Miriam gave him a stern look, although her eyes dancing with merriment. "You know that you would and that you have."

William grinned cheerfully and leaned over to kiss his wife on the cheek. "Ahhh...too true."

Shaking her head with exasperation, Miriam kissed her husband and walked out of the room. William looked down at his son and grinned. "So, you tried to escape the dreaded bath, did you? Sorry son, but you didn't make it this time. You'll have to take your bath or your mother will skin us both alive," he said.

James's eyes widened with shock, "Mummy would do that?" he asked in awe.

William nodded his face solemn. "Oh yes! You know how serious she is about little boys taking a bath," he said.

James pouted and said, "Me no like bafs. They yucky."

William chuckled at the disgusted expression on James's face. "That may be true, but you'll have to take one. Tell you what, you take one tonight without arguing with your mother and Minsky, and I'll take you out on my broom tomorrow."

James's face lit up and his eyes rounded with excitement. "You will?" he squeaked.

"I will," William replied solemnly. James squealed with glee. He threw his arms around his father's neck and hugged him hard. "So, what do you say?" William asked.

James nodded excitedly. "Me be good. Me take yucky baf so that me go fly tomorrow," the little boy said eagerly.

"That's my boy," William stated. He walked out of the room with James chattering excitedly along the way.

Harry's eyes pricked with tears as he watched his father and grandfather walk out of the room. That was what he had wanted in life. He wanted a father who would care for him, a father who would love him. He would have loved to have known his grandfather. From what he had seen in the Pensieve, Harry believed they would have enjoyed each other's company.

"So, did James finally get into the habit of bathing?" Ron asked idly.

Sirius chuckled. "He did, but William always did love telling us about how James would try to escape his nightly bath. I think James was seven before he realized that it was fruitless to escape Mum Miriam," he said with a nostalgic grin.

"What happened to my grandmother?" Harry asked.

Sirius's eyes darkened. "She died in the same attack that killed your grandfather. If Dumbledore did indeed have something to do with William's death, then he also killed Miriam," Sirius said, his eyes cold. "If there was anyone who didn't deserve death, it was Mum Miriam. She was a joy to be around, so full of life and love. Everyone knew she loved to take in strays. She may have only had one child, but she was a mother to all. You would've loved her, Harry. Molly reminds me a lot of her."

"It looks like Dumbledore has a lot to answer for," Harry growled angrily, a twinge of regret coursing throughout his body. He wished he could have known his grandparents.

"Next memory," Severus said quietly. Harry nodded and turned back towards the room. The room swirled and disappeared.

Harry found himself standing in the same room, except there was no fire in the fireplace. William was sitting at the desk, reading the morning paper when the door flew open and a boy ran into the room.

"Dad, I got it!" James exclaimed, his arms waving around. Clutched in his hand was a piece of paper. He ran over to his father and slammed it down on the desk. "Look Dad, I got it!" he said excitedly, his face beaming with joy.

William put the paper down and looked down at his son with a grin. He picked up the paper and read it. "Oh ho! I see that my boy is going to Hogwarts. I told you not to worry, James. I knew you would be going. You're a Potter after all and all Potters have gone to Hogwarts."

"I know," the eleven-year-old boy said. "I wasn't worried."

"Right," William drawled and James's face flushed with embarrassment.

"Well, not much," James said sheepishly.

William chuckled and James's face brightened. "So, when can we go shopping for my stuff?" he asked excitedly.

"I guess we can go today. I don't have anything planned," William said.

James whooped with joy. "All right! Hey, do you think they'll let me take a broom?" he asked.

William shook his head, exasperated. "Apparently you haven't read anything. No first year can take a broom," he said.

James frowned. "Awww man!" he whined.

William chuckled. "Come on, my boy. Let's go shopping," he said as he got out of his chair.

"Whoo hoo!" James crowed. He rushed over to the door and stopped. He turned slowly and looked at his father pensively. "Dad, do you think I'll have any friends?" he asked softly.

William walked over to his son and reached down to tousle his hair. "I think you'll have plenty of friends. You'll make friends at Hogwarts that will last you the rest of your life. They'll be good friends. Don't you worry James, you'll have friends," he said.

James looked at his father with a satisfied expression. "If you say that I will, then I believe I will. Thanks, Dad."

William smiled at James softly and said, "You're welcome, son."

The room disappeared and Harry cleared his throat. He had choked up at the expression of love on his grandfather's face. He felt a hand on his arm and looked up. Sirius was looking at him with an expression of concern. "You all right?" he asked softly.

Harry nodded. "Just realizing what I missed out on."

A look of pain flashed over Sirius's face and he pulled Harry into a hug. "I wish things had been different for you, Prongslet. I wish you had grown up with a family that loved you. Even though that didn't happen, I want you to know that I love you. You're my godson. You're the closest thing I have to a son. While I may not be what you wanted, I'm still your family," Sirius said.

Harry sniffed softly. "You'll always be my family, Padfoot. I just wish that Dad and Mom could've been with us."

"As do I, kiddo. As do I," Sirius said softly.

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Three hours and many memories later, Harry sighed in frustration. Neither Pensieve had anything about Dumbledore in them. There

was nothing but William's memories of his family. While Harry enjoyed it, the memories didn't help him with the Dumbledore problem.

Looking over at his friends, he said, "I think we need to leave this Pensieve. I don't see anything here that will help us."

"Yes, let's do. I'm tired of seeing memories of James," Severus sneered.

"Don't make me hit you," Sirius growled.

Harry rolled his eyes with exasperation. "Would you two grow up?"

Severus and Sirius glared at each other before looking at Harry. Sirius grinned sheepishly and Severus sneered. Harry shook his head and looked over at Ron, who was looking thoughtful.

"What is it, Ron?" Harry asked.

"I don't understand why your grandfather would go through all the trouble of shielding two Pensieves if there was nothing to show for it. There has to be something here, something that we're missing," Ron explained.

"If there is, then I don't know how to find it," Harry said. "Maybe Miss Cameron was wrong and the evidence got destroyed the night my grandfather died."

Ron frowned and shook his head. "No, we're missing something. I just can't figure it out. Maybe you need something more than just your blood."

Harry thought over what Miss Cameron said and shook his head. "No, there isn't. Miss Cameron said that the evidence could only be retrieved by the blood of the Potter heir."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, the scene in the Pensieve changed. With a wild whirl, Harry was standing in front of

his grandfather. The man looked older and there were lines of tension on his face.

"James, if you're standing here now, then it means that Dumbledore was successful in killing me. I'm sorry that I couldn't be there with you now, son, but I had a job to do. I have hopes that Dumbledore will not find out about me, but if he does, then I want you to use what you find in these two Pensieves and bring that man to justice. I hope that you'll understand exactly what type of man Dumbledore really is. I pray that Dumbledore doesn't get to you as well. I'm sorry that I won't be around to see you and Lily get married. I want you to do everything in your power to protect your children. Dumbledore has plans for you, my son, and I fear for the Potter line, as well as the Gryffindor line," William explained solemnly.

"You know as well as I do, that only a few know about our true heritage. Dumbledore is one of them. He has a plan set into place to gain more power for himself in the Wizarding World and it includes you and your children. There is more to Voldemort than even Voldemort himself knows. Dumbledore plans to use the Gryffindor line to defeat Voldemort, who is the Slytherin heir. What you don't know is that Dumbledore made certain that Voldemort was evil. Tom Riddle had no chance for any other life. The plan was implemented before Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald. Once he realized that there was a Dark Lord to defeat, he did everything in his power to make sure he was the one to defeat Grindelwald."

"He realized that by doing this, it would only further his plans of power. Once Grindelwald was defeated, Dumbledore reveled in the power that came from being the most powerful Wizard in the Wizarding World. That was just a taste; Dumbledore wanted even more power. Then he heard a prophecy about his eventual downfall, so he took steps to insure that he would be invaluable to the Wizarding World once again. It is prophesized that one of the Gryffindor line, marked by the Slytherin heir, will bring down the Bumblebee," William said.

Harry felt chills as he saw the look of fright on his grandfather's face. "I can't emphasize enough how much danger our family line is in. I fear for your life and the lives of any of your children. Do not believe a word that Dumbledore tells you. Voldemort will try to kill you and your

children, Dumbledore will see to that. He is only using Voldemort to do his dirty work, and not even Voldemort knows about it. What I am about to tell you is what Dumbledore will have killed me for. Many years ago, the last surviving member of the Slytherin line fell in love with a man. They were together for several years, keeping their liaison a secret from the rest of the world. One day the woman found out that she was pregnant with her lover's child and with great joy, she told him. The man was delighted that she was pregnant as it meant his plans were falling into place. He obliviated her and replaced her memories of their time together with memories of another man, a Muggle," William explained.

Harry began to breathe heavily as he realized where his grandfather was going with this. He couldn't believe the one thought that was crowding his mind. He looked over at Ron, Sirius, and Severus and saw horror on their faces as well. Merlin, he wasn't the only one to understand what William was saying.

"He then obliviated the Muggle and fed him false memories of the woman and their time together. As soon as the man realized that the woman was a witch and was pregnant with his 'child', he abandoned her and the child. The woman died in childbirth and the baby went to an orphanage, where he was continually abused on his real father's orders," William said softly.

Harry inhaled sharply, a feeling of sickness spreading throughout his body as he realized that he was right. Merlin, he was going to be sick. He couldn't believe that....

"Voldemort, aka Tom Marvolo Riddle, is in fact Dumbledore's son," William said.

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CHAPTER TWENTY- SEVEN

"Oh my god," Harry breathed in horror. He took a step back and bumped into Sirius. He turned around and looked at his horrified godfather. "No," Harry said as he shook his head in denial. "Surely, he wouldn't do that." Sirius gave him a helpless look.

"I think I'm going to be sick," Harry moaned. He took a step back and disappeared from the Pensieve. Harry looked around the room dazedly, his stomach churning with nausea. With a moan, he leaned forward and threw up. He leaned against the table heavily, panting, trying to catch his breath. "Dobby," he called.

The house-elf appeared before him and looked at him, concerned. His eyes widened when he saw the vomit on the floor. With a snap of his finger, the vomit disappeared. Dobby leaned down and placed his hand on Harry's forehead.

"You don't have a fever. What's wrong?" Dobby asked.

"Harry, are you all right?" Ron asked as he rushed over to his brother.

Harry looked up and smiled weakly. "Yeah, I'm fine. I just needed to be sick. I just couldn't believe what I heard. It's just so wrong. One person is responsible for all those deaths, my family, the terrorizing of the Wizarding World and no one even knows about it. How can no one know the truth about Dumbledore? HOW?" Harry yelled, frustrated.

"Harry, people don't want to see what's right in front of them. They want to ignore it and pretend it isn't there," Sirius said softly.

"But why? Why would they want to do that? If someone had just said something, or did something, Voldemort would've never have risen. My grandfather and parents would've never died. I just...I just don't understand," Harry said, tears filling his eyes. Dumbledore had killed his family, and torn apart even more families. Voldemort may have done the killing, but Dumbledore put him on the path. Dumbledore had his own son abused and humiliated, so that Tom would begin his path to darkness. Merlin, what else did the man do to Tom?

"Harry, what's going on?" Dobby asked, confused.

Ron blew out a breath and sighed. "We found out something about the Headmaster that, well frankly, is very disturbing," he said gently.

"Disturbing?" Harry asked incredulously. "That man is twisted! What else did he do to Tom? If he could have his own son abused to further his plans, then what else could he have done?"

"Tom?" Dobby asked. "Who is Tom and what do you mean Dumbledore's son?"

"Tom Riddle, a.k.a., Lord Voldemort is actually Dumbledore's biological son. He obliviated Tom's mother and planted false memories her and Tom's supposed father's mind. Tom Riddle has no clue that Dumbledore is his father. The Headmaster gave orders to the orphanage where Tom grew up to have him abused so that he would be more susceptible to darkness. It's all part of a plan that Dumbledore has implemented," Ron explained to Dobby.

Dobby looked at them in shock. "The Dark Lord is Dumbledore's son? Oh great heavens," he said with a sigh. "What else did you learn?"

"So far that's all we've learned," Ron said.

Harry had his head bowed as he thought about what he had heard. It just didn't make sense to him. A sudden thought struck him and he raised his head quickly. Harry looked at Severus, his face filled with confusion.

"I have a question that I hope you might be able to answer," Harry said.

Severus nodded. "If I can."

"If Voldemort is Dumbledore's son, then whose bones did he use in order to be reborn?" Harry asked. The room went silent at the question. They hadn't thought about that.

"He had to use the bone of his father and I know that Wormtail had some bones. So whose were they? If they weren't his father's bones, then how was he actually reborn? Could the bones of anyone else work?" Harry asked.

Severus shook his head. "They might work, but there would've been complications in the ritual. Besides, why would he use the bones of anyone else? As far as the Dark Lord is concerned, Riddle was his father. You ask a very good question and sadly, I don't have an answer for you. I have feeling that Dumbledore might have done something though," he said thoughtfully.

Harry frowned. "Then that would mean that he knew about the ritual. How? If he did, then was the TriWizard Tournament deliberate on his part?"

"You know," Severus began slowly, "I had heard rumors that the tournament was going to be held at Durmstrang, but when Dumbledore announced to the teaching staff that it was going to be held at Hogwarts, I dismissed it as rumors and didn't think of it again. Now though, maybe Dumbledore arranged for the tournament to be held at Hogwarts. If it had been held anywhere else, Harry wouldn't have been sent because he was too young. It would seem to the rest of the world that he just wanted the prestige for Hogwarts and he had the political pull to get the tournament held at Hogwarts."

Harry groaned. "How much of my life has been manipulated by that man? How in the hell did he know that Voldemort was going to do that ritual? I thought the Ministry was in charge of the tournament. I just don't understand how he knew," Harry said, frustrated.

"Who was in charge of getting the ritual ready?" Ron asked.

"Wormtail," Harry hissed. "He's the one who tied me up, the one who did the ritual, the one who took my blood, the one who stole the bones..." Harry trailed off, shocked.

"Could Wormtail be a spy for Dumbledore?" Sirius asked.

Harry's eyes widened at the question. He shrugged, stunned by the possibility. "It would make sense. Wormtail is the only one who knew about the ritual."

"So, Dumbledore knew about the ritual and decided to give Wormtail a bone to complete the ritual?" Ron asked doubtfully.

"It could happen. A spell could remove a bone from the body and Skele-Grow could replace it. He needed Voldemort to be reborn if he wanted to have Harry defeat him," Severus said.

Harry shook his head. "There's a problem with that though. The words that Wormtail used when he did the ritual was...Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son...So if Dumbledore knew he gave the bone, the ritual wouldn't have worked," Harry explained.

The room was quiet for a moment before Ron piped up. "What about memory spells? Could Wormtail have told Dumbledore ahead of time, acquired the bones, then obliviated him? He would technically be unknowing."

"It could work I guess. In order for the magic to work, at the time the bone is used, the person must not know that he gave the bone away. Whether he knew about beforehand shouldn't matter. I haven't researched the spell so I can't say for sure," Severus said.

"In light of this possible situation, finding Wormtail is all that much more important. Once again, he has the answers we need. If it's true, then when did Wormtail become Dumbledore's spy? Has always been the spy or did he turn to Dumbledore for help only to be betrayed?" Sirius asked thoughtfully.

Harry sighed heavily. "Right now, we can't do anything about it and I don't feel good. I don't think I'm ready for anymore right now. I need to eat something, and then maybe take a nap. I'm feeling rather drained."

"That's fine, Harry. Sleep and we can pick this up later," Sirius said. "In the meantime I have something I need to do."

Harry looked at him curiously. "Oh yeah? What?"

Sirius grimaced. "I have to go talk to a wolf that I know," Sirius said sourly.

Harry's face blanked out and he sneered. "Have fun with that," he said coolly.

"Yeah, go me," Sirius sighed.

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Remus looked up from the book he was reading at the sound of footsteps coming down the hall. He laid the book down on the bed and sat nervously, waiting for whoever was going to talk to him. He had only seen Dobby since he arrived here. He hoped that Sirius would come and visit him, but he hadn't. He hadn't heard anything about what was going on and Dobby did nothing but growl at him whenever he asked what was going on. Remus had to admit that he was afraid of the new Dobby. He never knew a house-elf could be so bloodthirsty. He'd had serious concerns when heard that Dobby was all for torturing him, but nothing ever came of it. He would like to think that Dobby was messing with his mind, but there was a glint in Dobby's eyes that scared him.

The door opened and Sirius walked into the room. He stopped and stared at Remus, his face cold and blank. Remus swallowed hard. This was his best friend, his brother, his Pack mate and he was afraid that he was going to lose him again. He knew that this time it would be permanent. He had no excuses for the way he treated Harry, and he knew Sirius took his godfather duties seriously. He thought of Harry as a son, and Remus had turned his back on him. There was really no excuse for his behavior.

Sirius looked around the room idly before his gaze settled back onto Remus. "Is Dobby taking good care of you?" he asked coldly.

Remus swallowed hard and nodded his head. "Good. I would hate for you to be...uncomfortable," Sirius sneered.

"Padfoot," Remus began.

"Sirius," Sirius stated.

Remus looked at him, confused. "What?" he asked.

"You can call me Sirius. Only those I consider family may call me Padfoot," Sirius said. His expression was cold.

Remus felt his heart fall and break. His wolf howled at the loss of his Pack mate. "I see," he whispered, pain lacing his voice.

Sirius's face grimaced momentarily before it smoothed out. "I'm not saying this to hurt you, Remus. You just don't have the right anymore. It's one thing when you thought I was a criminal, that you thought that I killed Peter, those Muggles, James, and Lily. It hurt, yes, but eventually I forgave you. However, when it came to Harry, you should have known better. I expected you to believe in him. I expected you to take care of him. I lived those years in captivity secure in the knowledge that even if I wasn't there, you were there for Harry. I was wrong! I can't even begin to understand how you could've blamed a fifteen-year old for my death. I just don't understand you, Remus," Sirius said passionately.

Sirius turned ran his finger through his hair, his frustration and anger obvious. "Ron has put forth the idea that maybe it was instinct. He said that we shouldn't forget that you're a werewolf, and that you have all sorts of instincts that a normal human wouldn't. You thought I was the last of your Pack and your wolf went a little mad, blaming Harry for my death. What I want to know is why don't you think of Harry as Pack? He is James's son, he is my godson, he thought of you as his honorary godfather; his last link to his parents. Why didn't you consider him part of your Pack, Remus? Why did you turn on him? He became part of your Pack the day he was born, when did it change?" Sirius asked, his face filled with anguish. "Did you not care for him anymore? Did you not love him as your own? If you didn't, then why not?"

Tears fell from Remus's eyes. He had no answers for Sirius, no excuses. He had done the unforgivable in Sirius's eyes. Remus didn't understand himself. Why didn't his wolf consider Harry part of the Pack? He didn't know -- he just knew that the wolf blamed Harry for Sirius's death. He didn't think that either Sirius or Harry would forgive him. He didn't know what to do. His wolf was howling inside of him. There was so much pain bottled up and he didn't know what to do with it.

"Sirius, I'm sorry," Remus said in a trembling voice. "I can't explain myself to you. I can't find enough justification for what happened with Harry. I know that Harry was incapable of murder, and I know that I shouldn't have blamed him for your death, but it was as if I didn't care. There are no excuses, Sirius."

"DIDN'T CARE?" Sirius yelled. "What kind of monster are you?"

Remus's face blanched. In all the time that he had known Sirius, he had never once called him a monster. Sirius had never been afraid of Remus or his werewolf. It hurt to hear Sirius call him that. Remus suppressed a sob. "I'm sorry. I'm so, so, sorry," he whispered.

Sirius snorted. "Yeah, well it's not me that you have to beg forgiveness from. It's Harry. He counted on you and you turned on him. Don't you think he had enough hate from his actual family? He didn't need you hating him too," he said his face filled with disappointment.

"I know. I guess I just joined in the mass hysteria. I listened to Dumbledore tell me how Harry turned Dark and it sounded good to me. It sounded right. I believed him and I went along with him to help convict Harry," Remus replied sadly.

Sirius froze and looked at him intently. "What did you say?" he asked harshly.

Remus looked at him, confused. "What?" he asked.

Sirius took an eager step forward. "About Dumbledore, what do you mean you went along with what he said?" he questioned urgently.

Remus gave him a wary look. "A couple of nights after Harry was arrested, Dumbledore had a meeting with several of the Order members..." he began.

"Who?" Sirius cut in.

"Um...Molly and Arthur Weasley, Kingsley, McGonagall, Tonks, and me," Remus replied.

"What did Dumbledore have to say?" Sirius asked.

Remus sat down on the bed as he tried to remember the conversation that night. "I remember he sat us all down and told us that Harry had killed the three students. There was proof and it was up to us to send Harry to Azkaban forever. He wanted us to testify against him. I remember thinking that there was no way I was going to testify against Harry, but by the time the night was over, I had changed my mind. The night is somewhat fuzzy. I don't remember exactly what was said," Remus murmured confusedly.

Sirius looked at him, his gaze absent. "Mmmm...I'm beginning to not like what I'm hearing. I wonder," Sirius muttered. "Would he have done something like that? After everything else we heard, why not?"

Remus looked over at him muttering friend and asked, "What's going, Sirius? Why does that night make a difference?"

Sirius looked sad. "It may make no difference at all. It's just an idea I have running around in my head. I need to talk to Severus," he said abruptly. He gave Remus one more glance then walked out of the room.

Remus sighed mournfully. He wasn't trusted. He would probably never know what was going on. Did that night have anything to do with Harry? What was it that Sirius heard? Could Dumbledore have anything to do with this? Remus realized he hadn't even had a chance to ask Sirius about Dumbledore and his captivity. He wanted to know more. He wanted to know what was going on. He also

wanted to know why Sirius and Harry were now friendly with Snape, of all people.

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Sirius walked into the den. He didn't want to get his hopes up, but the thought kept nagging at him. What if Dumbledore had messed with Remus's mind? Could he have done something to Remus? If so, what about the other Order members? Could he have betrayed them as well? Maybe there was more to the Weasleys behavior than they thought. He hoped so, for Ron's sake. He didn't know if it would change anything, but maybe it could help Ron deal better with his family's betrayal.

"Severus, I have a question. Actually, it's more of a favor," Sirius said.

Severus looked up from his Potions Journal and looked at him with question on his face. "Yes?" he asked.

"I just got finished talking to Remus and he said something that disturbed me," Sirius informed him. "I was wondering if you could tell me your thoughts on it."

Severus snorted. "Anything that werewolf has to say is disturbing," the Potions Master sneered.

"Regardless of your feelings about Remus, I need your unbiased opinion. I also need your knowledge of potions and spells," Sirius said.

Severus looked intrigued. "What did he say?" he asked.

"We got into the reasons that Remus turned on Harry. He couldn't come up with anything that made sense. He had no excuses. He just said it was as if he didn't care about Harry anymore. His wolf doesn't consider Harry part of the Pack, which doesn't make sense. Harry became part of his Pack the day he was born, so why would that have changed? He told me that after Harry was arrested, Dumbledore had a meeting with a few select Order members. The meeting consisted of Molly and Arthur Weasley, Kingsley,

McGonagall, Tonks, and Remus. Remus told me that Dumbledore wanted them to testify against Harry. He told them that Harry was guilty of the three students' deaths. Remus said that the rest of the night was somewhat fuzzy. He doesn't remember it very well. When the meeting started, Remus was adamant about not testifying against Harry, but once the meeting was over, he had changed his mind. He doesn't remember how that happened. Is there anything that Dumbledore could have done to the people at that meeting?" Sirius asked.

Severus looked thoughtful. "There are several potions and spells that could be used to coerce someone. He might have been obliviated as well, or the spell or potions could've made his mind fuzzy. There is also the fact that some of those potions do not react well with Werewolf physiology. It could've had some kind of adverse effect on him. But Sirius, it's a stretch," he said.

Sirius leaned back in his chair and sighed. "I know which is why I don't want to say anything to Harry yet. I don't want to get his hopes up that Remus might not have been in his right mind when he testified. If I'm wrong, then Harry never needs to know about it, but if I'm right and Dumbledore did do something, then we need to find out what. I was wondering if you could help me."

Severus frowned thoughtfully. "Normally, I would tell you no, but for Harry's sake, if there is any way to prove that Remus was coerced then we need to find out. I will use Legilimency on Remus to see if I can find his memories of that night. I also need a sample of his blood. There is a very slight chance that if a potion was used it could still be in his blood. If it was a spell, then maybe the memories of that night will tell us which one was used," he explained.

"What if he was obliviated that night?" Sirius asked.

"I can unblock his memories, but it will cause him pain," Severus said. "You need to make sure that this is what you really want to do, because it will hurt him."

Sirius nodded in understanding. "We need to find out for sure. We need to know if Remus was in his right mind," he said decisively.

"And if we find out that Remus testified all on his own? That he turned his back on Harry without coercion, then what will you do?" Severus asked gently.

Sirius looked lost. "I don't know. I just don't know," Sirius whispered.

Severus gave him a moment before standing up. "I'll need some things from the lab. We should do this now while Harry is asleep. Maybe when he wakes up, there will be good news for once."

Sirius nodded and watched Severus leave. "Severus," Sirius called as Severus reached the door.

Severus stopped and turned around, a question on his face. "Yes?" he asked.

"Thank you," Sirius said. Severus gave him a nod and walked out of the room. Sirius sighed softly. "Please, let us find something. I want my best friend back."

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Sirius paced in front of Remus's room, impatiently waiting for Severus to appear. He was anxious. He hoped that they would have good news for Harry and himself soon. He heard a noise and saw Severus stalking down the hallway, his face stern and cold. Severus nodded at him, and Sirius took a deep cleansing breath before opening the bedroom door.

Remus was sitting by the window, staring out over the grounds. He turned and looked at them when they walked in. His eyes widened a bit when he saw Severus and he looked at Sirius with curious expression.

"Lupin," Severus greeted coldly.

"Snape," Remus replied evenly. "How can I help you?"

"Sirius has brought to my attention a discrepancy in your memories. I am here to see what we can find," Severus explained.

Remus gave them a confused look. "What do you mean a discrepancy?" he asked.

"Your meeting with Dumbledore after Harry was arrested. Your memories of that night were fuzzy, you said. I believe you told Sirius that you didn't want to testify against Harry, but by the end of the meeting that had changed. We want to know if you were coerced into helping convict Harry," Severus said coolly.

"Why would Dumbledore do that?" Remus asked, his face filled with disbelief.

"There is much about the Headmaster you don't know. It's not something that we can go into right now," Severus explained.

Remus looked thoughtful. "Does this have something to do with Sirius being held captive by the Headmaster?" he asked.

Sirius's eyes widened. "How do you know about that? I never said a thing to you about that. Did you know about? Were you aware that I was alive?"

Remus could hear the accusation in Sirius's voice and it hurt that Sirius could believe that of him. "No, Sirius, I didn't know you were alive. I saw you when Dobby stopped by Hogwarts. You were injured and he dropped a letter, which I picked up and read. I didn't know what to believe. At first, I thought that it was a cruel joke, but there were too many clues in the letter. Things that only a Marauder, or a Marauder's son, would know about. I almost confronted the Headmaster about it, but I didn't. It was a gut feeling," Remus explained.

Sirius snorted. "It's a good thing you didn't. He would've killed you. A very select few know I'm alive. I don't trust the Headmaster not to try to do something about that."

"Lupin, I would like your permission to use Legilimency on you. I need to know if Dumbledore did something to your mind. If he used a potion on you, then I need to know what it is. I need to know if it's something that is fast acting or if it's still in your system. If it wasn't a potion, then I need to know what spell he used on you. The meeting you described was suspicious. We need to know what went on that night," Severus explained.

Remus realized that there was more going on here than just the issue of Harry. What was it that Dumbledore had done? What would he have to gain by having Harry arrested? Something wasn't right and these two knew what it was. If he wanted to know, they were going to have to trust him and in order for that to happen, then he needed to trust them.

"All right, you can look into my mind," Remus said.

Severus nodded and walked over to Remus. He pulled out his wand and pointed it at the werewolf. "Legilimens."

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Severus had reservations about doing this, but he wished to repay Harry for his help. He knew that Harry loved Remus, and Remus's betrayal had hurt him. If he could prove that Remus was coerced then Harry would regain another friend. He still didn't like the idea of reading the werewolf's mind.

He watched Remus as he explained what he needed to do. He could see the hesitation and fear on the werewolf's face. Severus was almost hoping that the man would refuse, but he sighed silently when he agreed.

He nodded his head in understanding and walked over to Remus. He pulled his wand out and pointed it at Remus. "Legilimens."

Memories that were not his flashed through Severus's mind. He saw the nights of the werewolf transformations. He could feel the pain, the animalistic rage, the sense of Pack that included a stag, a black dog, and a rat. He saw the memory of the night when the werewolf bit

Remus. He could feel the fear, the pain, and the sorrow as the little boy realized that he was now a monster.

Memories of Remus's days at Hogwarts, the friendships, the sorrows ran through his mind. The demeaning memories as Remus tried to find work, but was turned away. He could feel the sorrow, pain, and betrayal when James and Lily Potter were murdered and Sirius went to Azkaban. He felt the extreme joy when Remus saw Harry Potter for the first time as a baby. Sirius was right, Remus thought of Harry as part of the Pack. What had changed?

Severus skimmed and shuffled through the memories, trying to find what he needed. He found the memory of Remus's first sight of Harry in his third year. There was still the feeling of Harry being part of the Pack. So even when he was older, Harry was still part of the Pack. Interesting.

Skimming more of Remus's memories, he found the night that Sirius supposedly died. The rage, the pain, and the grief; the last of the Pack had died. Severus frowned subconsciously. Why was Sirius the last of the Pack if Remus thought of Harry as Pack? What did he miss?

Severus tried to find the moment when Harry was no longer Pack, but he couldn't find it. Something was hiding it. It just wasn't there. Could Dumbledore have done something to Remus? To the werewolf? Severus began to feel very uneasy about this. He dug further into Remus' mind, ignoring the memories that had nothing to do with Harry, Sirius, or Dumbledore. He finally found something, a small hidden memory. It was just a scrap of memory, but it gave Severus pause.

He watched as Dumbledore asked Remus to help him at the end of Harry's fourth year. Voldemort had been reborn and Sirius had been essentially exiled to Grimmauld Place. Remus walked into Dumbledore's office and the look on the man's face was one that only a select few, including Severus, had seen. It was the cold, malicious look of a man on a mission. He watched as Dumbledore raised his wand and muttered a spell then the memory stopped. What was the spell that Dumbledore used?

Adligo Lupus – bind the wolf. Interesting. Why did Dumbledore need to bind Remus's wolf? What did he do to it? Severus dug deeper until he found a blank wall in Remus's mind. Severus touched it and hissed as he was thrown out of Remus's mind. Remus had been obliviated and the memories were protected by further spells. Was this Dumbledore's doing or a natural instinct of Remus's mind?

Severus took a deep breath and looked down at Remus. "Well?" Remus asked anxiously.

"I found a rather disturbing partial memory. Do you remember the Headmaster ever binding your wolf for anything?" Severus asked.

Remus looked shocked. "No, never. When did this happen?" he asked.

"After Harry's fourth year. Sirius was in enforced hiding at Grimmauld Place and Dumbledore wanted to talk to you. When you went to the Headmaster's office, he bound your wolf and that's when the memory ended. Another thing, your wolf considered Harry part of the Pack when you saw him in his third year, but when Sirius died, you had no such feeling. I wonder if Dumbledore did something to your wolf," Severus explained.

Remus looked pained. "But why? Why would he want me to think that Harry wasn't Pack?" he asked.

"Because if Harry wasn't Pack, then Remus wouldn't interfere in Dumbledore's plans," a voice said from the doorway.

The three men whipped around in shock and saw Ron standing in the doorway. He smirked at them and said, "Be glad it was just me. So, what's going on?" Ron walked into the room and sat down on the bed.

Severus sighed, annoyed, and locked the door. He didn't want Harry to come in. Not that he thought Harry would want to visit Remus. "We think that Dumbledore might have done something to Remus. It looks like he did something to Remus's wolf that made the wolf no longer consider Harry part of the Pack. Your explanation for the reason for

doing so is sound. If he already planned to get rid of Sirius, who was undermining his authority with Harry, then I bet he wanted to make sure that Remus had no say in what he did as well. Remus would consider Harry the last Pack member. He would've done anything to protect Harry. Dumbledore didn't need nor want that aggravation," Severus said thoughtfully.

"What about the night of the meeting? Did you find anything about that?" Remus asked.

Severus shook his head. "No, you were Obliviated, and there are some serious protections around the memories. I'm not sure if it's the Headmaster's doing or if it's your own mind trying to protect you. I can try to break the block, but it will be quite painful. The choice is up to you," he said.

"Meeting? What meeting?" Ron asked. Sirius explained what he had found and Ron's face became enraged. "Another thing that bastard has to answer for," he hissed.

Remus looked at him, confused, but didn't ask because he knew they wouldn't tell him. Remus thought about whether or not he should have Severus unblock his memories. He bit his lip thoughtfully and decided that he needed to know. He wanted to know what the Headmaster had done to him. Why did he bind the wolf and was it still bound? What was it he wanted Remus to do?

Remus looked at Severus and nodded. "Go ahead and break the block. I understand that it will be painful, but I need to know. If there is even a chance that Dumbledore did something to me that made me turn on Harry, then I want to know, because I can't live with myself otherwise. It just doesn't make sense to me that I would do that."

"All right. For what it's worth, I'm sorry for what I'm about to do," Severus said gruffly.

Remus gave him a weak smile. "I understand, Severus. It needs to be done," Remus replied firmly.

Severus sighed softly, lifted his wand, and pointed it at Remus. "Legilimens," he said softly. Severus entered Remus's mind and dug around until he found the blocks. He gently began to apply pressure on the blocks, but they held firm. He could hear Remus moan as he felt the pain in his head. Severus applied even more pressure, and the block bent slightly. Severus growled with annoyance. He didn't want to hurt Remus this much, but the blocks were well protected and holding. Hoping that Remus would forgive him, he sent a burst of power towards the blocks. He heard Remus scream as he was thrown out of Remus' mind and slammed against the wall. He fell to the ground, his mind in a daze. He could distantly hear Remus sobbing, and Sirius muttering what comfort he could.

"Severus, are you all right?" Ron asked as he knelt down next to Severus.

Severus groaned, his head throbbing in pain. He looked up at Ron and smiled grimly. "I'm fine, but my head is killing me, as well as my back. Help me up; I need to see to Remus."

Ron helped Severus up and they made their way over to Remus. The werewolf had his head in his hands and he was moaning softly. Severus pulled a potion bottle out of his pocket and handed it to Sirius, who opened it and made Remus drink it. Remus stopped moaning and he looked up at Severus and said, "Ow."

"Indeed," Severus replied dryly and Sirius snorted in laughter.

"Tell me you did something, at the very least?" Remus asked with a whine.

"No, the protection around the memories is very strong. I'm not sure that we can get to the memories without killing you or destroying your mind. I don't even know how they are being protected, I just know that they are," Severus said.

They heard a pop as Dobby appeared and began to babble frantically. "Professor, come now! Harry is in pain. He needs help," he said.

Severus looked over at Dobby, shocked. "What happened?" he asked as he made his way to the door.

Dobby shook his head. "I'm not sure. A few minutes ago, I was checking on him during his nap when he grabbed his head and screamed. I went over to see what was wrong; he was holding his head, and muttering something about protecting it, that he needed to protect it," he explained.

Severus stopped and looked at Dobby in disbelief. He looked over at Sirius, who was looking both scared and horrified. "How in the hell did that happen?" Severus asked.

"What?" Remus asked, concerned.

"Harry is protecting your memories," Severus said flatly.

Remus gaped at him. "What? How?"

Severus shook his head. "I don't know, but we need to find out. Come on."

He stalked out of the room and made his way to Harry's room. Sirius had wanted to keep Remus's little problem a secret, but that was unlikely now. How was it that Harry was protecting Remus's memories? Or was he? Could it be something else? He didn't know, but he was going to find out.

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CHAPTER TWENTY- EIGHT

Harry lay trembling on the bed, his head spiking with pain. He distantly heard Dobby say something about getting Severus, but he didn't pay attention. What the hell just happened? The most excruciating pain that he had ever felt woke him up. Even when Voldemort was torturing people and sending it through the link, it had never been this bad. What was it that he needed to protect? He thought he had heard Voldemort scream in pain as well. Had something happened to him?

Harry didn't know how long he lay there, waiting for Severus, but he finally heard the door open and Severus's voice asking him where it hurt. He snorted, and then groaned as his head throbbed once again. I fucking hurt all over, you stupid greasy bat. What a dumbass question, he thought with a pout.

He heard a chuckle and realized that he had said it aloud. He tried to care, but he couldn't. He was in too much pain. Severus lifted his head up gently and placed a glass at his lips.

"Drink, Harry. It's a pain-relieving potion. It'll help with your head," he heard Severus say.

Harry drank it down eagerly and sighed with relief as he felt its immediate effects. Merlin, that felt good. He sighed blissfully and opened his eyes warily. He looked up at Severus, who grinned at him, and said, "Er...sorry." He knew he had a sheepish look on his face.

Severus shrugged it off. "It's all right, Harry. People say a lot of things they don't mean when they're in pain."

Harry smirked at him. "Oh no, I meant it. I just didn't mean to say it aloud," Harry retorted mischievously.

Harry heard Ron and Sirius start laughing while Severus grinned wryly. "I just bet you did. Are you all right?" he inquired.

"Yeah, I'm better now," Harry said with a grimace.

"What happened?" Ron demanded, his face concerned.

Harry shook his head. "I'm not sure. I was sleeping when excruciating pain just exploded throughout my head. I had this overwhelming urge to protect something. I don't have a clue as to what happen. The strangest thing is, I swear I heard Voldemort screaming in pain. It was like an echo through my mind," he explained, confused.

"Did you feel the pain throughout your head or was it specifically in your scar?" Severus asked.

Harry considered this a moment before slowly nodding his head. "It was in my scar. I wonder if something happened to Voldemort."

Severus shook his head. He looked thoughtful. "I don't think anything happened to the Dark Lord. Dobby," he exclaimed suddenly before turning towards the house-elf. "I need you to go to Hogwarts and discreetly check on Dumbledore. I want to know if he's in pain as well."

Dobby nodded. "If he is, can I hurt him some more?" he asked eagerly.

Ron and Sirius laughed as Harry grinned widely. Severus shook his head with exasperation. "No, not now. I just need to know his state of health."

Dobby pouted, nodded his head, and disappeared.

Harry looked at him, confused. "All right, what's going on?"

Severus frowned a moment before replying, "I have a theory on what's going on with you and Voldemort, but I need to wait until Dobby gets back before I can be positive."

Harry sighed and lay back on the bed. He closed his eyes, trying to relax his body. He didn't realize how tense he was until his body relaxed. He felt the bed move and he opened his eyes. He looked up at his godfather and smiled wearily. Sirius was looking at him worriedly. He reached down and stroked Harry's head.

"You sure you're all right, Prongslet?" he asked.

Harry nodded. "I really am. My body aches a bit and so does my head, but I'm fine. I would like to know what's going on. It was so sudden. My scar didn't itch or even ache. It just came out of nowhere. It was like someone stabbed me in my mind," he explained.

Harry saw a brief look of guilt on Sirius's face before it disappeared. Harry looked at him suspiciously and glanced over at Severus, who looked uncomfortable. Harry realized that they knew something. Harry sat up and looked between Sirius and Severus, his face suspicious.

"All right, what's going? Why does Sirius look like someone kicked him while he was in his dog form?" Harry asked. He heard Ron choke with laughter and looked over to his brother. His eyes widened as his gaze swept past Ron. Harry's face went cold as he glared at Remus, who had been standing silently in the doorway.

"What the hell is he doing in here?" Harry asked coldly.

Sirius, Ron, and Severus looked over to see Remus standing in the doorway. Sirius groaned, annoyed. "Dammit Remus, you were supposed to stay in your room."

"I wanted to know what was going on, Sirius. I thought the timing of Harry's screaming was strange. I think I have a right to know," Remus said quietly.

Harry got up from the bed and stalked over to Remus. He glared at the man who he had considered his adopted godfather. "You think you have a right to know about anything that has to do with me? You have no right, Remus!" Harry snarled.

"This isn't just about you, Harry. I know that you hate me, but you don't know everything that's been going on," Remus explained.

Harry narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean? What's been going on?" he demanded.

Harry saw Remus glance over his shoulder and he whirled around to stare at the other men in the room. They fidgeted and didn't look at him. Harry was getting frustrated. Nobody was telling him what was going on and he knew that it had to do with him.

"If someone doesn't tell me what's going on, I'm going to start kicking ass. You have NO RIGHT to hide this from me, especially if it has something to do with me. I've been through too much for you guys to start protecting me now. So somebody had better talk," Harry demanded, his voice cold and his eyes hard and intent. Power was flaring up and whipping around Harry's body.

Sirius took a step forward, reaching out to calm his godson. "Calm down, Harry. I'll tell you. I just didn't want to say anything until we knew for sure. I didn't want to hurt you if I was wrong," he explained softly.

"What is it, Padfoot?" Harry asked. He heard a choked sob behind him. He whirled around and noticed that Remus had tears in his eyes as he looked at the floor. Harry frowned slightly. Why was Remus crying? Harry looked back at Sirius, who shrugged.

"Sit down on the bed and I'll explain what's going on," Sirius said.

Harry sat down and waited impatiently as Sirius got comfortable. Sirius explained about the odd situation with Remus. Sirius got to the part about Severus trying to remove the blockage and Harry looked at Remus with surprise. Harry couldn't help but feel a faint sense of hope that maybe Remus wasn't in his right mind when he turned on him. What about the Weasleys? Was something done to them as well? He looked at Ron, who had paled when Sirius explained the meeting and hoped for Ron's peace of mind that Dumbledore had done something to them. He didn't know if forgiveness would ever happen for them, but maybe it would give Ron a sense of closure.

"So, what's protecting the memories?" Harry asked.

Severus shrugged. "As I said, I have a theory, but I will wait until Dobby gets back before I will say anything."

Harry looked back at Remus, who was still looking at the ground, his face filled with sadness. Harry frowned, bit his lip, and wondered if it was going to be that easy. Could he forgive Remus that easily, even if he had been tricked into abandoning him? He didn't know for sure. He remembered the pain he had felt when Remus turned away from him. He heard a popping noise that brought him out of his thoughts. He looked up and saw that Dobby had returned.

Dobby looked at Severus. "Dumbledore is in the infirmary, complaining about a headache. From what I could hear, it came on suddenly," the house-elf informed him.

Severus nodded his head, looking satisfied. "It's as I thought," he muttered.

"What? What do you know?" Harry asked.

"There is a block around the memories, a powerful block that I can't get past. Dumbledore wanted to make certain that Remus's memories could never be recovered. He did a spell, using blood magic, to block those memories. I assume he thought he still had a use for Remus, so instead of killing him off, he messed with his mind," Severus explained.

"Blood magic? That's illegal," Remus said quietly.

The room filled with snorts and mutterings as Severus smirked. "So is obviating someone or keeping someone captive for three years, but he didn't seem to care about that. What's one more thing to add to a growing list, most you don't even know about," he said coolly.

"How does the spell work?" Ron asked.

Severus sat down in the chair and leaned back, looking comfortable. He tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair as he gathered his thoughts. "The blood ritual is called *Ab Abdo Cogito, To Conceal Thoughts*. It uses the blood of a Wizard and a spell to cast a shield around the memories the Wizard wants to hide. There are various reasons why this spell is illegal. The main reason is that it involves

blood magic, which is all Dark according to the Ministry. The real reason this spell is illegal is because when the spell is activated, it doesn't just affect the person that it's being used on. It also affects the Wizard who used it and anyone in the same bloodline," Severus elucidated.

"Anyone with the same blood?" Ron asked, confused.

Severus nodded. "Sons, daughters, grandchildren, siblings, parents, and grandparents would be affected. Most of the time it isn't a problem, but if someone tries to unblock the memories, everyone would feel the same intense pain. Of course, the block is only as powerful as the blood. The fact that Dumbledore did the spell means that the block is powerful. It will be hard to break," Severus explained.

Ron still looked confused. "So why was Harry affected? He doesn't have the blood of Dumbledore running through him."

"No," Harry said softly, "but I have a link to Voldemort. Any Dark Magic that he does, I feel unless my shields are up. I was too tired and drained earlier so I forgot to occlude my mind. It must have been Voldemort that I heard screaming." Harry stopped a moment and grinned. "You know, if I had my shields up and it hadn't actually hurt me, I would say that it couldn't have happened to a nicer bunch of people. Oh...er...sorry Severus," he apologized sheepishly.

Remus shuffled nervously by the doorway and looked over at Severus with a puzzled look. "I understand why I and Dumbledore were affected, but why were Voldemort and Harry affected? It makes no sense."

Harry looked over at his friends gave them a questioning glance. Should they tell Remus about what they had learned? If Dumbledore had manipulated Remus, then he had the right to know as well. It's not as if they were going to keep it a secret. They would eventually get around to telling the Wizarding World about Dumbledore's secret child.

"You had better sit down for this, Moony. You're not going to like it," Sirius sighed.

There was a brief look of happiness on Remus's face when Sirius called him Moony. He sat down on the bed next to Sirius, looked around the room, saw their serious faces, and began to look wary.

"Why do I have a feeling that this is going to be bad?" Remus asked.

Sirius snorted. "Because it is. Harry found several shielded Pensieves in the Potter vault. For reasons that are not important right now, Harry decided to investigate what was in them. It seems that Dumbledore killed William Potter and Mum Miriam," he said gently.

Remus gasped in shock. "No!" he blurted out. "Why? Why would Dumbledore that?"

"William was gathering evidence of Dumbledore's wrongdoings. I'm sorry Remus, but Dumbledore is not the kind, benevolent man we thought he was. He's evil, he's even more evil than Voldemort," Sirius said.

Remus shook his head in denial. "How do you know this?"

"Some of the information came from personal experience and some came from other sources that I'm not going to disclose right now. Now what I'm about to tell you is shocking, but we do have the evidence. Harry will probably let you see the memories. We haven't seen everything yet. In fact..." Sirius babbled.

Remus cut in. "Sirius, just tell me."

"Voldemort, a.k.a. Tom Riddle, is Dumbledore's biological son," Sirius stated abruptly.

Remus began to laugh nervously. "That's not funny, Sirius," he said. He quieted when he realized that no one else in the room found that at all humorous. Remus swallowed hard. "You're not kidding, are you?" he asked, his voiced strained.

Sirius shook his head and Remus sat there, staring at them in shock. "Oh god," he whispered.

"There's more," Sirius said. He explained about the plan that Dumbledore had implemented before he had even defeated Grindelwald. He told Remus about Tom Riddle and the abuse that Dumbledore ordered. Remus sat there, stunned, his mind whirling with the new information. The Headmaster, the man that had let him attend Hogwarts, the man who had given a werewolf a chance, was evil. He was responsible for the death of William and Miriam Potter.

Remus's haunted eyes looked over at Sirius and asked, "What about James? Was he responsible for James and Lily's death?"

Sirius sat a moment, staring at his friend's haunted eyes. "It's beginning to look like it."

Remus stood up and began to pace. His face was flushed, his eyes bright with rage. They glowed a golden color as his wolf surfaced. Dumbledore had killed part of his Pack. Remus growled loudly. Dumbledore would have to die. He must avenge his Pack mates.

"Moony," Sirius began but was interrupted as Remus tilted his head back and howled in pain. Tears pricked Sirius eyes as he heard the overwhelming agony in Remus's voice. He felt a hand on his arm and looked over at Harry, who also had tears in his eyes. They started at Remus as he continued to howl. Once he stopped, he collapsed to the floor, panting and sobbing. Sirius got up from the bed, walked over to Remus, squatted down, and hugged him.

"Why, Padfoot? Why did he do it? What does he have to gain?" Remus asked tearfully.

Sirius soothed his friend. "He wants power and he doesn't care how he gets it. He's been getting away with murder, literally, for years, but we finally have the evidence we need to stop him."

Remus pulled back and glared at him. "Do you really think that this is going to stop him? If you go to the papers or the Ministry and inform them of what you know, it's still not going to stop him. He has to have contingency plans. If he's hidden his evilness this long, you had better believe that this is only going to piss him off. It's bad enough

we have Voldemort, but if we have to deal with Dumbledore as well, there won't be anything left. Dumbledore has to die!" Remus snarled.

"I know Remus, but how do you plan to do that?" Sirius asked.

"It's a full moon in a week. I'll be glad to take care of this little problem then," Remus growled, his eyes glowing brightly.

Severus snorted, amused. "If you do, I want to be there to watch," he said.

"Done," Remus said seriously.

Sirius rolled his eyes. "Moony, you can't go attack the Headmaster. Don't think he has taken precautions?" he asked.

Remus shrugged, pouting slightly. "Fine, I won't do it." Remus looked at Severus with determination. "I want those blocks on my memories off. I don't care how much pain it causes me, I want to know what that bastard did to me."

"Usually I would say forget it. It's both very painful and very dangerous for you, Remus. But, we need answers. One way of taking off the blocks is getting blood from either Dumbledore or Voldemort. It would be the least painful way of doing it. If we can't do that, then we would need Harry to take the block off," Severus explained.

Harry looked up, surprised. "Me? Why?" he asked.

"Because you are extremely powerful -- stronger than both of them, and you have a link with Voldemort, which can only help," Severus said.

"But Severus, I don't have the control I need."

Severus nodded. "I know. I haven't forgotten that," he said seriously.

"I can get the blood from Dumbledore. He wouldn't see me coming. I can probably get past any shields that are protecting him," Dobby

said eagerly. "I can wait until he goes to sleep and pop into his room. I wouldn't mind taking some blood from him."

Severus suppressed a grin at the bloodthirsty house-elf. "All right, Dobby. See if you can get some blood from the Headmaster. I wouldn't want to ruin your fun. I only need a half a vial, which is in the lab. Just be careful," he said and Dobby nodded in understanding. He was practically bouncing with excitement.

"I have a question. Why can't Dobby just kill Dumbledore while he's at it?" Ron asked.

Harry snorted. "Prophecy, remember," he said sarcastically. "Plus, if Voldemort finds out that Dumbledore is dead, then he would begin upgrading his attacks. Right now he fears Dumbledore and that is keeping him at bay."

"It sounds like we have to take them out together then. Oh well, that'll be easy," Ron said sarcastically.

Harry shook his head and grinned. "What about Fawkes? Won't he try to stop Dobby? Better yet, why is Fawkes still with him? I thought phoenixes only bonded with Light Wizards?" Harry asked, confused.

Severus looked surprised. "Didn't I tell you? The Fawkes in Dumbledore's office is nothing more than a transfigured owl with protective spells on it. I thought I told you about that?" he said.

Harry blinked with surprise. "I think I would remember that. Wait, if Fawkes was a transfigured owl, then who saved me in the Chamber and swallowed the spell for Dumbledore at the Ministry?" he asked, confused.

Severus shook his head. "I don't know. I don't even know if Fawkes was really Dumbledore's phoenix and left him, or if he had always been a transfigured owl."

"Well I know one thing; whatever was in the Chamber with me was a Phoenix. His tears healed me and he got me, Ginny, Ron and the twit out. Of course, I don't understand why any phoenix would've

swallowed the Killing curse for Dumbledore," Harry said with a pout. He frowned a moment. "I wonder why he saved me. I wish I could talk to him."

The song of a phoenix filled the room and Harry looked around in surprise. Ron snorted with amusement. "You ever get the feeling that you should just stop asking questions? Every time you do, something happens."

A phoenix appeared in a flash of flames and flew around the room, singing joyfully. It flew around at a dizzying pace, its song getting faster and faster. Harry could feel a sense of peace fill his body. The phoenix swooped down and landed on the bed. It waddled over to Harry and trilled at him. Harry reached up slowly and began to pet the phoenix.

"Er...Fawkes?" Harry asked cautiously. Fawkes trilled an affirmation and pressed his head into Harry's hand, eager for another caress. Harry grinned slightly. Fawkes looked Harry in the eyes for a moment and with a sudden movement, he turned and scratched Harry's hand with his beak. Harry pulled his hand back, surprised, hissing in pain. He looked at Fawkes warily. "What did I do?" he asked.

Fawkes lowered his head and scratched himself. The scratch began to bleed and Fawkes rubbed his beak in the blood. He lifted his head up and reached over to Harry's hand, trilling a demand. Harry reached out cautiously and watched warily as several drops of blood dripped off Fawkes beak and into the scratch that Fawkes made.

Harry could feel power invading his body as the phoenix blood mingled with his own. His head fell back and his mouth opened as a rush of sensation crashed into him. He could feel a sudden snap and for the first time since he left Azkaban, his power felt settled. He could hear Fawkes singing, as he concentrated on a faint tugging in the back of his mind.

He mentally touched the tugging and gasped as he became aware of an alien presence in his mind. His eyes flew open in shock and he stared at Fawkes in surprise. He could feel amusement and affection flowing into his mind. He was gazing at the phoenix dazedly.

"Fawkes? Is that you?" Harry whispered mentally. He heard laughing.

"Harry, what's wrong? What happened? Are you ok?" Sirius asked urgently.

Harry looked at his godfather blankly. "Uh...yeah. I can feel him in my mind," Harry replied.

Severus perked up. "He bonded with you?" he asked.

"I think so," Harry said hesitantly as he looked at Fawkes. "Give me a moment."

"Yes, Harry. I have chosen to bond with you. I have been waiting for you for a long time now," Fawkes said cheerfully.

"You have?" Harry asked.

"I only bond to those of the Potter line. I have been waiting until it was time."

"So you were never bonded to Dumbledore?" Harry asked, confused.

Harry felt rage and anger fill him at Dumbledore's name and realized that it came from Fawkes. "I can take that as a no?" Harry asked.

"That man uses my name to gain stature and respect, leaving everyone to believe that he is a Light Wizard," Fawkes said angrily.

"Why haven't you shown them otherwise?" Harry asked.

Fawkes sighed. "I was waiting for you to be ready to accept the bond. I didn't want to take the chance that Dumbledore might harm you if I did something about my imitation."

"I see. Why do you only bond with the Potter line?" Harry asked.

Harry could feel Fawkes amusement. "Because you are of the Gryffindor line. I had originally bonded to Godric, and I promised him that I would bond with those that I felt worthy in his line. The last Potter I bound myself to was your great-great grandfather, Aaron," Fawkes explained.

"Why not my grandfather or my father?" Harry asked curiously.

"They weren't powerful enough to handle the bond. A wizard must have a significant amount of power in order to keep a bond with a phoenix stable," Fawkes told him. "That's why there aren't very many phoenixes bonded to wizards."

Harry sat there stunned. He knew that he was powerful, but he didn't realize that phoenixes bonded themselves to only powerful wizards. He thought it had to do with whether they were Light or Dark. "So the fact that Dumbledore has a 'phoenix' shows the Wizarding World that he's powerful?"

"Yes, and it also shows that he is a Light Wizard. Dumbledore is very powerful, but he's Dark. No phoenix will ever bond with him and he knows it."

"He knows about you, right? He's using your name. Doesn't that idiot know that you could prove his claims false?" Harry asked, confused.

Fawkes laughed. "He knows that Godric had a phoenix named Fawkes, so therefore he chose that name. He was upset to find out that I'm actually quite real. I must admit I gave him quite a turn when I came to you in the Chamber. I think he was waiting for me to do something, but I didn't. It wasn't time yet," Fawkes said.

Harry grinned at the thought of Dumbledore anxiously waiting for the other shoe to drop. He must have been on the edge for months after that. "Why did you save him from the Killing curse?"

"It wasn't his time yet. You were not ready to face Voldemort. Of course, I didn't know about the plot to send you to Azkaban. I'm sorry, my chosen," Fawkes said mournfully.

Harry petted him softly. "It wasn't your fault. If Dumbledore had died and I was still sent to Azkaban, Voldemort's way would've have been cleared and he would have taken over. You couldn't have done anything."

Harry and Fawkes sat there quietly as Harry soothed the phoenix. He didn't blame Fawkes for anything. He couldn't have done anything to stop the Malfoys, Dumbledore or the Ministry. While he may have hated being in Azkaban and he hated Dumbledore, he would've hated it more if Voldemort had taken over. He probably wouldn't even be alive, no matter how much power he had. Harry groaned. He needed to find a way to control his magic. He had this urgent feeling that he would need it soon.

Fawkes trilled gently. "You don't have to worry anymore, Harry. When I bonded with you, I gave you the control you needed. I grounded your magic. Using your magic shouldn't be a problem. I am your familiar now. That's what we do."

Harry face brightened. "Really?" he wondered aloud. He heard an amused affirmation and Harry grinned widely.

"What is it, Prongslet?" Sirius asked. He had been watching Harry and Fawkes intently. He had seen many emotions crossing Harry's face. The wide, beaming smile that Harry gave him made him smile back at Harry.

"Fawkes is my familiar," Harry said happily. He was petting the phoenix, a look of contentment on his face.

Severus sat up abruptly. "Your familiar? Then that means..."

"My magic has been grounded. I finally have control over my magic," Harry said cheerfully. "Once I learn what I need to, I can finally face Voldemort and Dumbledore. Of course, I haven't figure out how to do that yet," he said, frowning slightly.

Ron grinned slyly. "How about we have a press conference, you let Voldemort know about it and let him know who his real Daddy is and then let him take care of Dumbledore," he said cheerfully.

Harry shook his head in amusement. He mused thoughtfully. "You know, you might have something there. What would Voldemort do if he knew that Dumbledore was his real father and his whole life has been lies and manipulations?"

"He would be enraged," Severus said. "He would do whatever he could to kill the Headmaster. In fact, I bet even Harry would become a minor concern."

"Plus, if he thinks that I'm still unaware of my surroundings that would give him another reason to go after Dumbledore first. He wouldn't worry about me; he would concentrate solely on Dumbledore," Harry said thoughtfully.

"You really want to put those two in a room and let them fight it out?" Ron asked in disbelief.

Harry sighed mournfully. "No, I guess not, but it was a nice thought," he said. His stomach suddenly growled and he blushed. "I'm obviously hungry," he whined "I haven't had anything to eat since this morning."

Dobby hopped on the bed. "Everyone in the dining room, now; it's time to eat!" he said sternly. He crossed his arms, tapped his foot, and glared at them. Harry grinned and got off the bed. Fawkes trilled and disappeared as they made their way out of the room. Harry was about to step out of the room when Remus called out to him.

"Harry."

Harry stopped and looked back at Remus, his expression blank, his eyes hard. "What?" he asked sharply.

"I want to say I'm sorry," Remus said softly.

"I'm not ready to have this conversation, Remus. We need to wait for Dobby to get Dumbledore's blood. If Dumbledore has messed around with your mind, then we can talk. Even then, it's going to be hard to get back what we had. What you did hurt me, it hurt me a lot, and it'll

be hard to get over. If you weren't coerced, then we have nothing to say. It means you turned your back on me and I don't think I can ever forgive that. We'll talk later," Harry said.

Remus swallowed hard and nodded his head in understanding. He watched Harry leave the room. He hoped that when they recovered his memories that they showed something that would help him get his friends back. He knew that if Dumbledore never did anything to him, then he was going to lose what was left of his Pack. With a sigh, he left the room.

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CHAPTER TWENTY- NINE

Two nights later Dobby went to collect blood from Dumbledore. The house-elf put the old wizard under the Petrificus Totalus spell while he was sleeping and then drew the blood in as painful a manner as possible. Later, he sadly explained to Severus, "I had to heal and obliterate him, even though I wanted him to remember his pain and helplessness. I know that he should have no idea that someone took his blood. I took him by surprise. I didn't want him to know that I was even there."

Severus looked sympathetic. "I understand, but at least you got a bit of revenge. You can feel good about that," he said.

Dobby had nodded cheerfully and disappeared back into the kitchen.

Severus took the blood and disappeared into the lab. Harry had no clue as to what he was doing, but he knew that it had something to do with being able to break the shields that were protecting Remus's memories.

Harry looked over at Sirius, who was talking excitedly to Remus, and frowned slightly. Sirius was Remus's guard since the werewolf was now allowed to roam about the castle. Although Remus gave Harry sad looks and hopeful smiles, the messy-haired man just couldn't get his hopes up. What if he believed that Remus was forced to betray him, only to find out that they were wrong? Harry didn't think he could take the disappointment. His feelings of betrayal were still strong. He just ignored the werewolf, too scared of being hurt in this. If Remus had also been betrayed by Dumbledore, who Harry knew, Remus believed to have been his protector and benefactor since he'd been eleven years old, the man would be devastated.

Harry's head flew up as the door slammed open. Severus stalked into the room, looking smug. "I have found the spell that will dispel the shield around Remus's memories," Severus announced proudly. "This castle has a very large library and I researched some very old, rare books which proved to be fruitful as I have finally found the canceling spell. Harry, you'll have to be the one to do the spell because of your link with Voldemort."

"Okay, so what? I say the magic and presto, Remus's memories are unblocked?" Harry asked curiously.

Severus snorted. "Not hardly. There will be pain involved, of course," he said maliciously as he looked at Remus. He looked back at Harry and grimaced slightly. "With the blood that Dobby got from Dumbledore, it will help, but there will still be significant pain. The spell involves the combining of your blood with Remus's and Dumbledore's blood. In addition, a small potion needs to be added that will aid you with the spell. Once the blood is combined, it is then smeared on your scar. Remus will have to be cut and the blood smeared on the wound. The blood needs to enter his body. Once that is done, you need to utter the spell. At that time, you will probably feel pain as the spell forces its way through Remus's shield."

Harry nodded warily. "All right. As much as I hate the idea of pain, we need to know what Dumbledore did to Remus. Will Voldemort and Dumbledore feel the same pain?" he asked.

Severus smirked. "Oh, Dumbledore and Voldemort should feel more pain than you will since Dumbledore used his blood to set the spell in the first place. Remus will probably feel more pain as well since it's his mind that you'll be entering. Any pain you feel shouldn't be too bad since the spell is only working through your link with Voldemort instead of any blood bond. I'm sorry about that," Severus said quietly.

Harry shook his head. "It's not your fault, Severus. We need to do this. We need to know what Dumbledore is hiding. If there is a chance that he had coerced Remus or any of the other Order members, then I want to know about it and I want to know why!" Harry growled.

Severus nodded, an understanding look on his face. "While I don't care about Remus's pain per se, I'll do what I can for you. I'll have some of the strongest pain relievers on hand. I insist that you take one before you do the spell. Nothing in the potion will interfere with the blood mixture," the Potions Master explained.

"Hey! What about Remus? Shouldn't he have some as well?" Sirius asked, outraged.

Severus looked at him scornfully. "If you insist. Remus is only here because we need information. You may have decided to trust your friend again, but I haven't. I won't until I see for myself that he didn't betray Harry on his own. I would've thought you'd have been a little more wary of who your friends were, but I see that I was wrong. I hope for your sake, your trust isn't misplaced," Severus said coldly.

Sirius opened his mouth to yell at Severus, but he noticed that Harry was watching the two of them warily. He realized that he hadn't really talked to Harry much for the last couple of days. His time had been spent with Remus and Harry wanted nothing to do with the werewolf. Sirius bit his lip and frowned as he realized that he had been neglecting his godson to spend time with someone they weren't even sure of. Sirius looked over at Remus, who looked sad, and realized that he had been so sure of Remus's innocence, that he had ignored those around him, who weren't as trusting. Sirius sighed. "I'm sorry, Harry. I hadn't realized..." Sirius trailed off.

Harry shrugged. "Hey, Remus is your friend," he replied flatly.

Sirius looked at Harry with disbelief. "Maybe, but you're my godson. No one is more important to me than you."

"But you've only known me for a few years while you've known Remus since you were eleven," Harry said.

Sirius's face stormy. "What is that suppose to mean?" he demanded harshly.

Harry shrugged warily. "I'm just saying that you have more history with Remus than you do with me. You've only really known me for a couple of years, and then you were held captive for the last few years. I can understand that you would want to spend time with your...friend," Harry stated coolly.

"Harry James Potter!" Sirius yelled angrily. "If you're trying to say that Remus is more important to me than you are, then you're an idiot. While I care for Remus, you are my godson. You're as close to a son

as I'll ever get. While it would hurt me to find out that wasn't Remus was coerced, it would kill me if something happened to you."

Sirius got up from his chair and walked over to Harry. He bent down and grabbed Harry's hands. "There is nothing more important to me than you. I can't reiterate this enough."

Harry looked away from Sirius. He wanted to believe Sirius, he really did, but so much had happened in his life. It was hard to trust anyone. He feared that he'd be betrayed again and he found himself not wanting to place his trust in anyone ever again. Harry bit his lip and looked back at Sirius. "I'm sorry, Padfoot," he said softly. "I'm having a hard time with trusting anyone right now."

Sirius sighed. "I understand, I really do. You have no reason to trust anyone of us in this room, except for the fact -- with the exception of Remus -- that none of us has ever betrayed you. We would never think of doing such a thing. You can bet your ass that if that does happen, then there is something wrong. We know you, Harry. We know what kind of person you really are. We would never betray you. You can count on that," Sirius stated firmly.

Harry glanced up at his brother. Ron looked at him seriously and nodded. Harry gave him a tremulous smile and looked over at Severus. Severus gave him an arched look and Harry could just see his irritation that Harry would even doubt Severus's loyalty. He grinned at Severus and the Potion Master rolled his eyes. He didn't bother looking at Remus. Turning back to Sirius, he smiled. "I'm sorry for doubting you," he said softly.

Sirius hugged him. "Hey kiddo, it's all right. As I said, I do understand. Just don't be so wary of trusting that you never trust anyone."

Harry nodded and pulled back from the hug. He took a deep breath and looked over at Severus. "So, when do we do the spell?" he asked.

Severus looked thoughtful. "Give me an hour to get the potions and set the things up. We'll meet here in the den and do the spell."

"All right. We'll do it in an hour," Harry said.

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An hour later, they were all sitting in the den. Harry was nervous. He was anxious about the pain, and what he would learn from Remus's memories. He hoped, for Sirius's sake, that Remus had been coerced. He knew that Sirius needed his friend. Remus was to Sirius as Ron was to him, a brother.

They all waited impatiently as Severus placed a bowl down in the middle of the table. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a vial of red liquid. Harry grimaced when he realized that it was Dumbledore's blood. He watched as Severus opened the vial and poured several drops into the small bowl.

"I need your blood, Harry," Severus said.

Harry sighed and nodded as he reached for the small knife that was on the table and cut his finger. He placed his hand over the bowl and watched as several drops of blood fell into the bowl. He healed the cut and waited as Remus did the same.

Severus mixed the blood together and added a couple of drops of a potion. The blood turned blue and Severus began to chant softly. Harry watched with amazement as the blood began to turn silver. With a tiny flash of light, the blood turned gold and Severus looked satisfied.

"The blood is ready. You two need to drink this potion to minimize some of the pain you'll feel," Severus said as he handed out bottles of red liquid to Harry and Remus.

Harry grabbed his and drank it down, grimacing at the taste. "Blech, tastes like mud," he said.

"Yes, it's not meant to taste good, it's meant to kill pain," Severus retorted archly.

Harry nodded as he felt his body go numb. He hoped this worked, because he really wasn't into pain. From what he'd felt before, he

knew that the pain would, most likely, be excruciating. Harry did get a little pleasure from knowing that Voldemort and Dumbledore would be in more pain than he would be. They didn't have advance warning of what was about to happen. Harry grinned viciously at the thought.

"I need you over here, Harry," Severus said, interrupting his thoughts.

Harry got up from the chair and sat down on the floor. He watched as Severus picked up the bowl and carefully smeared a small knife with the changed blood. Severus reached down and carefully smeared the blood over Harry's scar. Harry hissed in pain as his scar flared up from the tingling magic of the changed blood.

"Are you all right?" Severus asked.

Harry nodded. "Yeah. I was just surprised. There's a little pain, but nothing major. I can feel the magic of the blood working on my scar," he explained.

Severus nodded with understanding. He stepped back and looked over at a nervous Remus. "Sit across from Harry," he ordered.

Remus got up from the couch, crossed the room and sat down in front of Harry. He gave Harry a wan smile and the messy-haired man had to repress the urge to comfort him. He wasn't ready to reach out to his old professor yet. He wouldn't think of it until they knew for certain if Remus had been coerced into betraying him. Severus picked up the knife and made a cut on Remus's arm. He then dipped the knife into the blood mixture, smeared the edge of the knife and covered the cut with it. Remus hissed in pain.

Severus set knife and the bowl down. He looked over at Harry. "Are you ready?" he asked seriously.

Harry nodded nervously. He had been over the spell several times and he knew it well. There really wasn't anything keeping him from doing this, except the expectation of the pain. Harry shook off the thought. "I'm ready," he replied.

"We'll be here with you, Harry. I have more pain relieving potion for when this is over," Severus said.

Harry gave Severus a grateful smile. "Thanks."

Severus nodded and took step back. Harry looked over at Remus and asked, "Are you ready?"

Remus shrugged. "As much as I'll ever be, I guess."

Harry grimaced. "Yeah, not really looking forward to pain myself. All right, here we go," he muttered.

Harry pulled out his wand and pointed it at Remus. "Divello Saeptum," he intoned. There was a momentary silence and then a sound of something ripping. Harry and Remus began to scream.

Harry could feel his scar begin to burn then there was a tearing sensation. It was painful. As painful as when Voldemort tortured someone and sent it through the link. Harry had a momentary thought that if this pain were blunted by Severus's pain relieving potion, he would've hated to have done this without it.

He could no longer think. The pain was overwhelming him. He could hear the distant voice of Remus screaming along with him. He could also feel Voldemort in his mind, whimpering as pain filled his mind. He felt a momentary sense of satisfaction at Voldemort's pain before his mind was once more overwhelmed with pain. He heard a loud scream and the pain suddenly stopped. He slumped to the floor and panted. He moaned as someone tried to move him. He felt nauseous and his whole body was hurting.

"Here Harry, you need to drink this," Severus urged as he held out a potion bottle.

Harry groaned as hands helped him sit up. He saw the potion bottle and grabbed it. He drank the pain reliever and sighed in satisfaction as the throbbing in his head and body decreased. He looked over at Remus and frowned, his face faintly concerned when he saw that

Remus was lying on the floor, unconscious. Sirius was checking him over.

"What happened?" Harry asked as he nodded towards Remus.

Severus frowned. "We're not sure. You both began to scream for several minutes, and then Remus gave one last scream and collapsed. I'm not sure. It could be that the pain overwhelmed him or it could be something more," he said.

Harry snorted. "I bet it was the pain. It was unbelievable, Severus. I thought I had gotten used to pain when Voldemort invaded our link, but this was more intense. It was as if someone was stabbing hot pokers through my brain. I can't even contemplate what it would've been like without your potion," Harry told him, his expression thankful. He grinned. "I heard Voldemort screaming through our link."

Severus smiled with cold satisfaction. "Yes, I bet the Headmaster was feeling it as well," he smirked.

Harry chuckled. "As I said before, it couldn't have happened to a couple of nicer guys."

Severus snorted, amused. "Are you all right?" he asked, his face expressionless, but his eyes concerned.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I feel a little woozy and my head is still throbbing some, but its fine."

"Good," he stated. "Now, I'm going to check on the werewolf." The Potion Master walked over to Remus and waved his wand over the unconscious man. A slight glow

surrounded him and Severus frowned at whatever he was seeing. "There is nothing physically wrong with him. There are some odd readings though. I see a ripple in his magic, but I'm not sure why."

Remus groaned. Severus took a step back just in time as Remus's eyes flew open and he lunged for Severus. His eyes were glowing gold, and he was snarling.

"Crap!" Sirius yelled.

Harry jumped up and pointed his wand at the snarling man. "Stupefy," he yelled. When the spell hit Remus, he went down fast.

"What the hell was that?" Ron asked, shocked.

Severus frowned as he took a step forward and examined Remus. "I think the wolf was released when Harry did the spell. Remember, it appeared that Dumbledore had bound the wolf within Remus. You must have released more than just the barrier around his memories. I wonder what else Dumbledore did to him. I think the wolf was a little angry," Severus said blandly.

Harry looked at him in disbelief. "You think? What was your first clue? The glowing eyes or the snarling?" he asked.

Severus smirked. "Maybe I just bring out the worst in people," he said whimsically.

Harry snorted in amusement. "Oh, you're not getting a denial here."

"So, what do we do with him?" Sirius asked.

"Dobby, take him up to his room and make sure you secure it. I don't want to give him an opportunity to escape before he calms down. Until that happens, we'll have to put off looking at his memories. There is no way I'm going to enter the mind of an angry wolf," Severus said.

Dobby walked over to Remus, reached down, and gently picked up the stunned man. He popped out of the room, taking the werewolf with him.

"Damn," Harry cursed. "I was hoping to find out more tonight."

"Give it time, Harry," Sirius said.

Harry laughed grimly. "Sirius, time is not something we have. Dumbledore is going to know what we did tonight. He's going to take steps to protect himself," he said. "We need all the time we can get."

"Yes, Dumbledore will not be happy that he has lost another pawn in his little game," Severus stated. "I fear for those who will get in his way now. I have a feeling that the gloves are going to come off soon. No one is safe."

Harry felt a chill creep up his spine. He wasn't ready. He was nowhere near ready, but that didn't seem to make any difference. The only protection they had right now was that neither Dumbledore nor Voldemort knew where they were hiding.

That didn't give Harry any comfort. It was only a matter of time before he had to face Dumbledore or Voldemort and Harry was scared.

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Divello -vellere -velli -vulsum (-volsum) to pluck apart, tear asunder, break up, destroy, interrupt; to distract, pull away, remove, separate.

Saeptum – a wall, enclosure, a barrier

CHAPTER THIRTY

"How's Remus?" Harry asked as he sipped his tea.

"I checked on him an hour ago and he's still raging. The wolf seems particularly angry. He's destroyed nearly everything in the room. The comforters were ripped to pieces, the furniture overturned or destroyed. It's hard to imagine him having that much strength until you see it," Sirius said softly.

"Um...any reason as to why the wolf is so angry?" Harry asked.

Sirius shrugged. "Severus seems to think that Dumbledore did something to it or it's just mad for being messed with. I'm not sure. Severus has a particular fear of Remus's wolf and has decided to wait until he calms down," he replied.

"It's been over four hours now. How much longer do you expect him to rage?" Harry demanded impatiently.

"Not sure, but if it's too much longer, I'll drug the man myself. We need to know what's going on and soon," Sirius commented.

Harry sighed softly. "You know that Dumbledore is going to figure out what's happening. He's not going to wait for us to be ready. Not only do I have to face Voldemort, but I also have to face Dumbledore. My power, while apparently immense, still needs to be refined. I was lucky that Fawkes grounded my power when we bonded, but I still have spells that I need to learn. I missed a year; a year that I needed. How do people expect me to take care of everything if I don't even know what I need in order to do it?" Harry asked, frustrated.

"Hey, don't worry, kiddo. Severus and I will teach you. Maybe Remus as well, if things work out," Sirius murmured thoughtfully.

Harry grimaced. He wasn't sure if he wanted Remus to teach him. True, the man had been the best Defense of the Dark Arts teacher he'd ever had, but things were still tense between them. Of course, he was going to have to put aside hard feelings and learn. That is, if Remus had been coerced.

There was a pop and Dobby appeared in front of them. "The werewolf is asking for you," he stated solemnly as he gazed at Harry.

Harry sat up, his expression surprise. "Me? Has he calmed down?" he asked.

Dobby nodded. "Yes, he's doing better. He still growls some, but the rage is gone. I have cleaned up his room and he is cleaning himself up. He told me to tell you that he is ready."

"Thanks, Dobby. Could you find Severus and Ron and let them know to meet us in the Den? I want you to come as well," Harry requested.

"Understood," and with that, Dobby popped out of the room.

Harry turned to Sirius, his expression nervous. "Well, this is it. We'll find out what was so important that Dumbledore had to hide it. I hope," he murmured.

"Come on, the sooner we meet him, the faster we'll know. I have to admit though, I'm nervous. I think this could make or break our friendship. I don't think I could be friends with Remus again if he actually testified on his own. I don't think I could see past that betrayal. He knows better," Sirius said.

"Yeah," Harry sighed softly. He grabbed Sirius's arm and dragged him out of the room. As they made their way to the den, they caught up with Ron.

"Hey, brother of mine, you nervous?" Ron asked.

"No, not at all. I mean, it's not as if this is important or anything. I'm not going to find out why Dumbledore messed with Remus's mind, which will lead to some important revelations, and, hopefully, to a clue that may destroy Dumbledore, while at the same time taking out Voldemort. Then there's Remus. I mean, the man did betray me, and he was only one of my father's best friends. It's not like he was anything important to me," Harry replied sarcastically.

Ron stopped and looked at him. "So, what you're saying is, is that you're nervous?" he asked, confused.

Harry blew out a quick breath and replied, "Yeah, I might be a little nervous."

"Huh. Thought so," Ron quipped.

Harry grinned and they walked down the hall. They entered the den to see Remus pacing around the room, Severus leaning against the wall, his wand out and staring at Remus intently. Harry noticed that Remus's eyes were still glowing bright amber. The wolf was still at the forefront, but at least the man had calmed down some.

"Harry, Cub," Remus growled when he saw Harry. The amber eyes flared briefly, before Remus closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Harry could see that Remus was trying to calm himself and the struggle was visible on his face. Remus's eyes opened and the amber was dulled. "I'm sorry. My wolf is restless. He apparently has been locked away for quite some time. The only time he has been able to come out is when I transform. I have noticed that my transformation have been increasingly more savage, even with the help of the Wolfsbane potion. I had just passed it off as another quirk of being a werewolf. Now, I know better," Remus explained bitterly.

"What do you mean, 'locked away?'" Severus asked.

"Dumbledore used a spell on me to lock away my wolf and any of the instincts that came with him. It was actually a couple of nights after Padfoot was to have died. I guess he thought since that the one person -- who had significant amount of influence over Harry -- was gone; he wasn't going to take the chance that I might take his place and try to interfere with his decisions regarding Harry. He locked away the wolf and repressed any feelings of Pack that I had for the boy. He wasn't going to take any chances," Remus said with a sigh.

The room was quiet for a moment before Sirius began to curse. "That son of a bitch!" he growled out. "That bastard! That cold, manipulative old bastard! I'm going to kill him!"

"Nice as that sounds, Sirius, what makes you think that Remus is telling the truth?" Severus asked coolly.

"What?" Sirius asked, confused. "He told us."

Severus snorted, a sneer on his face. "That's right, 'he told us.' However, we know that he's capable of betrayal. He could be feeding us lies to make us trust him. What makes you so sure that he's really telling the truth?" he asked.

Sirius opened his mouth to defend Remus when Harry piped up. "I agree. It's not that we don't trust you Remus, it's well...we don't trust you."

Ron chuckled with amusement, while Severus grinned wryly. Harry shot Ron a sharp look, who returned it smugly. Harry rolled his eyes and stared at Remus. "You have to understand, you could be lying to us and we would never know it. I don't trust you and I sure in the hell don't trust Dumbledore. You betrayed my trust once; I'm not going to give you another chance to do it. You either let Severus read your mind or you're out of here. There will be no discussion about it. I have no qualms about Obliviating you and letting you go. Dumbledore can take care of you, however he likes," Harry said coldly.

Remus swallowed hard. He nodded his head in understanding. "All right. To show that I'm not lying, Severus can read my mind. I want to show you, Harry, that you can trust me."

Harry's eyes flickered over him coldly before replying, "We'll see then, won't we?"

"Harry," Sirius began before Harry cut in.

"No, Padfoot. This is non-negotiable. I have more than just myself to think of. I don't want Severus, Ron or even you put at risk because we didn't do all we could to find out the truth," Harry explained. His stance was commanding; his eyes glowed with power; his expression firm.

It hit Sirius suddenly that Harry was no longer a child. He had grown up while Sirius had been imprisoned. Life had matured Harry in a way that should have taken many years. Azkaban had taken its toll on him as well as the betrayal of those who he considered his family and friends. Sirius felt pride when he saw the mature young man standing before him. He knew that Harry hated to be known as the Boy Who Lived, but the man that stood before him was going to be a leader. This man would make a difference in the Wizarding World and he was proud to know that he would be there to watch while he did it. Well at least he hoped he would be there to watch. Sirius looked over at Severus and saw the same realization on his face. The exchanged a smile and Sirius nodded back at Harry.

"All right," Sirius murmured.

"Severus, you're up. Ron, I want you to get one of my pensieves. I want a copy of the memories in case something happens to either Severus or Remus. Sirius, I want you and Dobby to stand guard. I hope that nothing will happen, but with our luck, Dumbledore will have some sort of trap set. And I don't want to be taken unaware," Harry explained.

Severus sat down next to where Remus had finally settled, after he'd stopped pacing. Remus looked at him warily, his expression nervous.

Ron came back in and set the pensieve down on the table. He moved over to Harry and stood next to him. He watched the two men on the couch intently as if able to see into Remus's mind himself.

Severus took a deep breath, trying to steady his nerves. "Are you ready?" he asked as he turned to Remus.

"As much as I can be. I understand why this needs to be done, but I'm afraid of everything I'm going to find out. There are blank spots in my mind. I still don't know what happened the night at the Order meeting. I'm actually surprised that I remembered as much as I do," Remus said softly.

"I'll try to be as gentle as I can, but as Harry can attest, it's not going to be easy. I'm going to have to dig through your memories. It will be more invasive than what I did before," Severus elucidated.

Remus drew in a shuddery breath and nodded. "Okay. Whenever you're ready."

Severus took out his wand, pointed it at Remus and muttered, "Legilimens." He entered Remus's mind and began to search. He dug through the memories that he didn't want and finally found the small batch of memories that had been blocked. There was still a light barrier surrounding them, but luckily that came from Remus's own mind instead of the barrier that Dumbledore had made. He gently peeled the barrier away and grasped the first memory he found.

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Remus walked into the Headmaster's office, his posture defeated. It had only been a couple of days since Sirius had been killed. He was depressed and the pain that filled him as he thought of his best friend, his pack mate, almost choked him. He stifled the tears that wanted to fall.

The Headmaster looked at him with concern. "Remus, my dear boy, have a seat. I need to talk to you. Are you all right?" he asked gently.

Remus shrugged, his expression despondent. "As much as I can be, I guess. Padfoot's death has hit me hard. It's hard to lose all my pack mates, but luckily, I still have Harry. I don't know what I would do if something happened to Harry. A werewolf is not meant to be without a pack," Remus said brokenly.

Dumbledore's expression hardened a moment before a soft look came to his eyes. "Yes, about Harry. I am worried about how Sirius's death is affecting him. His only father figure has died and I'm afraid he is blaming himself."

"I know. I told him that if ever needed to talk, then I would be there. I can't lose him too. I need him in my life. He's my last pack mate. I'll do whatever I can to make sure that he gets through this. As much as

I hate it, it can only make him stronger, and Merlin knows, he needs to be strong for what's coming," Remus stated firmly.

Dumbledore looked at him, confused. "What do you mean for what's coming?" he asked.

"Sirius told me about the Prophecy," Remus explained.

The Headmaster's eyes widened a moment. "How did he know?" he asked.

"Apparently James and Lily told him before they went into hiding. He made an oath that he wouldn't tell anyone unless James and Lily were dead. Since their death, he's been in Azkaban, unable to tell a soul. He told me during the summer before Harry's fourth year. I haven't told Harry yet. I want him to have as much of a childhood as possible. However, after what happened at the Ministry, I believe that he needs to know. He needs to know why Sirius died, what he was protecting, besides just Harry," Remus explained.

"I see," Dumbledore said coolly. "I hadn't realized that anyone else knew about the Prophecy."

Remus looked at him, confused. "Is that a problem? I really think Harry should know about the prophecy."

Dumbledore smiled genially. "I agree with you, which is why I told him as soon as I got back from the Ministry. He wasn't happy at all, but I think he'll adjust to it. He has a duty to the Wizarding World," he commented.

Remus's eyes widened. "A duty? He's only a fifteen-year-old boy. What duty can he possibly have?" he asked, outraged.

Dumbledore's eyes hardened. "Be that as it may, he is still the only one that can defeat Voldemort. The prophecy has predicted it. There is no other way. He must be ready," he explained.

Remus's expression grew fierce. "He is still a child. He shouldn't have to worry about killing. He should be dating, playing Quidditch,

worrying about girls. I refuse to let you destroy what childhood he has left. I may not be his official Godfather, but he is still part of my Pack. I will not let him be turned into some mindless soldier for your war," he growled.

Dumbledore's expression went cold. "Yes, I was afraid of that. Regardless of what you would like, Harry has a duty to the Wizarding World and to me. He will defeat Voldemort. I'm afraid that you'll just be in the way. I cannot have you interfering with my plans, werewolf," he hissed coldly.

Remus's eyes widened with shock. "Albus?"

Dumbledore pulled out his wand and pointed it at Remus. "Petrificus Totalus," he muttered.

Remus's body was frozen. The Headmaster got up from the desk and walked over to Remus. He looked down at him coldly and said, "I would kill you, but it would only make Harry more upset. I need him focused on Voldemort, not his grief. Therefore, I will have to take care of you some other way. I have researched long and hard on the off chance that you might become bothersome. You think of Harry as pack, well the wolf does, so I need to change that."

Remus tried to whimper, but he was frozen. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. The kind benevolent man that had let a werewolf come to Hogwarts wasn't what he seemed. His mind cried out as he realized that no one knew. Harry was in danger from the one man he thought he could trust and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

The Headmaster pointed his wand at Remus and muttered, "Cavea Lupus."

Remus felt the spell hit and he was unable to cry out as the pain hit him. He could hear his wolf howl through his mind as it fought the spell. Remus's body tried to struggle to get away from the pain, but he was frozen. His wolf continued to struggle against the spell and Remus tried to help, but couldn't. A golden cage surrounded the wolf, trapping him and with one last howl of rage, the presence of the wolf

faded so much that he could barely feel it. Remus felt a sense of loss spread throughout his body.

"Not to worry Remus, the wolf is still there. He's just caged. You are no longer ruled by his instincts. Harry is no longer part of your pack. However, just to make sure, Imperious," Dumbledore chanted.

Remus could feel his mind fade away. There was an insistent voice telling him that he needed to forget about Harry being a pack mate. Harry was only a student, the son of a dead friend, nothing more. His worry over Harry should be minimal, at most. Remus struggled against the voice, but it was too strong. After a few minutes of struggle, he succumbed to the voice.

Dumbledore stepped back from Remus, his expression satisfied. "Now that I've taken care of your wolf, I think you need to forget about it. I can't have that memory floating around in your head on the off chance that something happens to your wolf. You should've stayed out of this. Harry is mine -- my pawn, my weapon. I will not have you interfering with my plans. I finally got rid of his godfather, I don't need another one to take his place," he said coldly.

The Headmaster raised his wand once more and muttered, "Obliviate."

Remus's world went dark.

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Severus pulled out of the memory with a gasp. He knew what Dumbledore was really like, but it still gave him a chill to see the Headmaster treat one of his former students like that. He had always thought the old man had a fondness for the former Marauder, but it was apparent that the old man cared for no one. Severus skimmed through more of Remus's memories until he found one that looked interesting. Glancing at it, he realized that this was the one he had been searching for. Gently, he grabbed at the memory and his surroundings disappeared.

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Remus sat in the Headmaster's office. He looked Molly and Arthur Weasley, Kingsley, McGonagall, and Tonks and sighed. He was waiting impatiently for the Headmaster to make an appearance so that they could talk about Harry.

Harry had been arrested for murder. There was no way that he could've done it. Harry may be many things, but he was not a killer. There was just no way. He wondered what the Order would do for him. He was sure that Dumbledore would do whatever he could for Harry. Albus would never let a student go to Azkaban for murder without a trial. He frowned briefly as he thought of Sirius, but realized that Sirius was a different case all together.

Dumbledore walked into the room and sat down at his desk. He crossed his arms, leaned on his desk and sighed. "I'm afraid that we are here together to discuss what is to be done with Harry Potter. According to the evidence, he did indeed kill Ginny, Cho Chang and Colin Creevey. I need your help to make sure that Harry is locked away in Azkaban forever," he explained.

Molly began to sob as Arthur held her tightly, his expression enraged. "Whatever you need, Albus. I can't let my daughter's murderer get away."

"Thank you, Arthur. I knew I could count on you. I need you to testify on any behavioral changes that you might have noticed from Harry. Things have not been right with the boy since Sirius died," Dumbledore sighed.

Remus frowned. "That's it? That's all you're going to do for Harry?" he asked, confused.

"What do you expect us to do? There is evidence that Harry killed those students. Why should we let him off? He may have defeated Voldemort once, but that doesn't give us the right to let him get away with murder," the Headmaster explained.

"But surely there's more to it than that? Have you realized that Voldemort would benefit from this? You say there is evidence, but

where did that evidence come from? Have you thought that maybe the boy is being framed?" Remus asked.

"Remus, I know that you care for the boy, but you can't let your emotions get the better of you," McGonagall replied.

"Yes, I care for Harry, but that doesn't mean that my emotions are what's causing me to question the convenience of the evidence. Is no one doing anything about this? Why not? It seems to me that everyone wants Harry to go to Azkaban. Why is that?" Remus questioned.

Dumbledore's expression hardened. "I'm sorry you seem to think that. I guess this means that I can't count on you to testify on Harry's erratic behavior. You know as well as I do that he hasn't been himself lately. He's was turning Dark and I'm saddened to say that I didn't do something before he killed those students," Dumbledore said sadly.

Remus frowned at the Headmaster. "Look, there has to be more to this than what we can see. Can you really see Harry killing anyone, especially Ginny Weasley? He thought of her as a sister. There's just no way he would kill her. I refuse to do anything that will send Harry to Azkaban. So if you want someone to testify, count me out. I refuse to do that to James's son. If Sirius were alive, he would kill me. I promised him that I would take care of Harry if something happened to him and I will," Remus growled. He almost started in surprise as he felt his wolf stir. It had been a long time since his wolf had gotten agitated about anything. He frowned slightly as he wondered why that was, but Dumbledore's voice distracted him from his thoughts.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Remus." Dumbledore looked at the other members of the Order and asked, "If you would excuse us, I would like to talk to him privately for a moment."

Arthur nodded and helped Molly up from her chair. He turned and glared at Remus before leaving the room. McGonagall gave Remus a look of disapproval before she too left the room. Kingsley nodded and walked out while Tonks gave him an unreadable look. Remus turned back to Dumbledore as the door to his office closed and was surprised to see Dumbledore's wand pointed at him.

"What the hell?" Remus yelled.

"I seem to have nothing but problems from you, werewolf. I already had to take care of you once before and now I have to again. I can sense your wolf stirring and that shouldn't happen. You're stronger than I thought. I won't make that mistake again. Imperious," Dumbledore muttered.

Remus felt the spell hit and he tried to force the voice out of his head. He wanted to refuse the command, but he wasn't strong enough. He didn't want to testify against Harry. He fought the suggestion as hard as he could and finally the voice disappeared. He gasped for breath and glared at Dumbledore. "You used an Unforgivable on me! You want Harry to go to Azkaban. Why?" he demanded.

"My reasons are my own, werewolf. You are just a pawn in my little game. Harry trusts you, but you can be sure that I'm going to destroy that trust. He'll have no one to rely on but me. I think a little time in Azkaban will change his attitude. Imagine how grateful he'll be when I get him out. I'll have saved him from his prison," Dumbledore explained.

"You're mad," Remus yelled, shocked.

"Ummm...maybe...but I'll still have the power I deserve and you're going to help me. Petrificus Totalus," Dumbledore yelled.

Remus's body froze and Dumbledore smiled with satisfaction. He walked to the shelf and picked up a small green bottle. He glared down at Remus. "You will no longer cause me any trouble. You may have been able to cast off Imperious, but you won't be able to resist this little potion." He leaned forward and forced Remus's mouth open. He poured the potion down his throat and massaged it so that he was forced to swallow the bitter solution.

Remus felt his mind go fuzzy and a voice whispered to him what he needed to do. "You will testify against Harry. You believe that he has turned Dark and you agree that the boy needs to be in Azkaban. You

will do whatever you can to help me in that. You will agree with me in everything that I do to the boy."

Remus's mind cried out one last time before his will was conquered. He knew that he would be putting Harry into prison and there was nothing he could do about it. He was broken.

"Again, you will not remember this. I need to find a way to make sure your memories cannot be tampered with," Dumbledore muttered to himself. "Obliviate."

Remus's mind went dark and the next thing he knew he was sitting in a chair in Dumbledore's office. Molly and Arthur looked satisfied, while McGonagall gave him a look of approval. Kingsley nodded and Tonks gave him a confused look before quickly changing her expression.

"I'm glad that you understand, Remus. I was afraid that your love for the boy wouldn't allow you to see that he has become Dark. He needs to be cast into Azkaban for his betrayal of the Wizarding World," Dumbledore was saying genially.

"Of course, Headmaster. I know now that I was wrong. I'll be glad to testify against the boy. Sirius must be turning in his grave," Remus said, shaking his head in disappointment.

"Indeed," Dumbledore said. He smiled gently as Remus and the memory faded.

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Severus began to pull out of Remus's mind, satisfied with what he had seen. Remus had indeed been coerced in betraying Harry. As much as he disliked the werewolf, he knew that Harry would be happy or at least satisfied.

Remus leaned his head back on the couch, moaning. Severus pulled out a bottle from his robe and gave it to Remus. "Here, this is a pain relieving potion. It should help your head."

Remus reached for it, opened it and drank it. He sighed as the pain dulled. He opened his eyes and looked at Severus. The werewolf's eyes were filled with pain, betrayal and rage. Remus opened his mouth to comment, but shook his head and closed his mouth. He glanced at Harry and whispered, "I'm so sorry, Harry. I..." He shook his head and closed his eyes.

Harry bit his lip and glanced at Severus, a question on his face. Severus sighed. "He was coerced. Dumbledore didn't want to take the chance that Remus would interfere with his plans. He was forced to drink a potion that mimics the Imperious curse and he was obliviated twice, as well as having his wolf caged. Hand me the pensieve."

Sirius grabbed the pensieve and handed it to Severus. The Potions Master aimed his wand at his head and muttered a word. The thin sliver stream glowed and Severus directed it into the pensieve. He repeated this process several times before handing the pensieve back to Sirius.

Sirius took it and placed it on the table. He looked over at Harry, Ron and Dobby and asked, "You ready?"

Harry took a deep breath. "Yeah, I'm ready."

Severus watched as they entered the pensieve. He hoped that this would help Harry. He needed to know that Remus had never thought him guilty and would've never have helped Dumbledore if it hadn't been for a potion and a slew of spells. Harry needed to know who had really betrayed him – and it wasn't Remus. He glanced over at the werewolf, who was looking at the pensieve absently. "Are you all right?" he asked gruffly.

Remus started, surprised. "Yeah, I'm fine. My head feels better. I've been going through the memories that I've suddenly gained. Did you know that Sirius asked me to be Harry's godfather? I was happy and I wanted to share it with Dumbledore – the man I admired more than anyone. Sirius had a document that would give me guardianship of Harry, even though I was a werewolf. If he were to die, I would need to sign it and complete the ritual, binding us as Godfather and

Godson. The Ministry wouldn't be able to do a thing about it. Harry could've lived with me. Unfortunately, Dumbledore obliviated the memory and I'm not sure if Sirius even remembers it. I'm assuming that Dumbledore didn't want to take any chances," Remus explained.

"What happened to the document?" Severus asked.

"I don't know. Sirius was suppose to hide it and let me know where it was later. I know he told Molly Weasley about it, but I don't know if she remembers that it existed either, or if she just didn't tell Harry because she didn't like Sirius. I'll have to ask him. I need time to go through my memories and see if there was anything else Dumbledore took from me," Remus said coldly.

The room was quiet for a few minutes before there was a gasp from Harry. Severus looked over and saw that they had left the pensieve. Harry turned around and looked at Remus, who was staring at him, tears in his eyes.

"Moony," Harry moaned softly.

"Cub," Remus answered.

Harry bit his lip hard and it drew blood. "That bastard!" he yelled. The glass in the room began to tremble as Harry's rage grew. Remus jumped off the couch and rushed over to Harry. He grabbed him by the arms and pulled him into a hug. "It'll be all right, Cub. We know now. I'm just sorry I wasn't strong enough to resist him," he said softly.

"No!" Harry yelled. The glass statue on the fireplace mantle shattered to pieces and Remus tried to sooth the enraged young man.

Harry pulled away and looked at Remus seriously, his eyes bright with rage and power. "It's not your fault, Moony. You resisted him as much as you could, but he is much more powerful than you are. I'm surprised that you managed to break the Imperious spell when you did. You were not whole. Your wolf was caged and you didn't have the strength. I don't think you even noticed it, but you were weak and sick. Your transformations took a lot more out of you than you even knew. Your wolf was angry from being kept caged and away from

your pack. I could see how tired you were. It's not your fault," Harry exclaimed.

"I would like to believe that, but it's hard. I hurt you, I betrayed you and there was nothing I could do about it," Remus whispered.

"I know. Even though I know that you believed in me and that Dumbledore used a potion to get your cooperation, it's hard for me to forget that you testified against me. It still hurts when I remember you telling me that Sirius would hate me. It still hurts to know that you blamed me for Sirius's death. I considered you family and you turned on me. I know mentally that you were coerced, but my heart still hurts," Harry explained.

"Do you think that we could ever be family again?" Remus asked.

Harry nodded slowly. "I think we could. Your memory of what really happened goes a long way in helping, but there are still emotions that I need to get through. I've believed for the last nineteen months that you hated me. I've been filled with bitterness, betrayal, anger and pain over it. I'm going to have to work through it. And you will need to work through the guilt that you feel. However, I think we have a chance. I need you, Remus. I need you to help me get ready for Voldemort and Dumbledore. Even though you have no memory of what happened to the others in the meeting, we need to find out if Dumbledore did the same thing to them. I need your help. Will you help me?" Harry asked.

Remus swallowed hard. "You know I will, Cub. You're part of my Pack, my family. I would die for you," he exclaimed.

Harry smiled grimly. "Let's hope it doesn't come to that."

"Moony," Sirius called.

Remus looked over at Sirius and smiled widely when he heard his nickname. "Padfoot," he answered.

Sirius rushed over for a hug. Pulling back, he grinned wryly. "I would apologize for the alleyway, but I won't. I didn't know, but if I you had actually betrayed Harry, I would've done more than that."

Remus shook his head, exasperated. "I understand, Padfoot. Trust me, I do understand."

Severus sneered at them. "This is all very sweet, but do you think we can focus. We have things that we need to prepare for. Lupin, do you think you can help train Harry? He needs to catch up on what he missed while he was in Azkaban."

"I would love to. If that's all right with Harry," Remus questioned as he gazed at Harry.

Harry nodded. "That's fine. I need all the help I can get. Ron could probably use a brush up as well. Isn't that right, Ron?" Harry asked his brother.

There was no answer and Harry glanced over at him best friend. "Ron?" he questioned.

Ron looked at him blankly for a moment, startled out of his thoughts. "Did anyone notice Tonks?" he asked.

"What?" Harry asked, confused.

"I was paying attention to the other members of the Order during the meeting. I'm thinking that there was something odd about Tonks' glances at Remus, both during the meeting, when they left and when he remembered them later on. There was just something about her expression. She knows something," Ron said absently.

"What do you mean?" Sirius asked.

Ron shook his head. "I'm not sure, but she knows something. Whether it's about Dumbledore or something else, I don't know, but her expressions are giving me a big sense of something being off. It's a gut feeling," he replied.

"You know that she quit the Order. She didn't believe that I killed anyone and she didn't want to be in a group that didn't do anything. She must've realized something was going on when Remus agreed to testify against me. I wonder if Dumbledore did anything to her. She never testified against me. Hell, she wasn't even at the trial. I wonder what happened to her. I never asked her," Harry mused.

Remus nodded thoughtfully. "You know, she was always trying to talk to me before your trial, but she never had the chance. Dumbledore was always around, keeping an eye on me and she never seemed to want to be around Dumbledore. She just disappeared one day. I remember vaguely that Dumbledore seemed rather upset about it as well."

"I think its time to invite Tonks here. I would like some more answers, plus she needs to train me in how to use my magical sight. And if Ron says something is off, then he's right. I trust Ron with my life, frankly more than any of you and when he says he has a feeling, I go with it," Harry explained.

"Ah, that's the sweetest thing you've ever said," Ron said mockingly.

"Well, you know, its all about you babe," Harry trilled cheerfully.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Whatever. I just know she knows something," he commented.

"Do you think she's a Watcher?" Sirius asked suddenly.

Ron looked thoughtful. "Um...I'll have to ask Percy. Maybe he knows."

"All right, you owl Percy and see if can tell you anything. Me, I'm going to go eat. All this emotional crap is making me hungry," Harry exclaimed.

Ron snickered. "Yeah, let's not get too emotional. It's not manly," he teased.

Harry snorted. "Please! I'm all man!" he quipped.

Sirius put his arm around Harry's shoulder and dragged him out of the den. "Sure you are. I believe it," he commented skeptically.

"Hey, you better believe it, buddy," Harry said.

"Suuureee," Sirius drawled.

Remus grinned as he heard the banter begin. He had a lot of work ahead to find his place back in Harry's life, but at least he had a starting point. Dumbledore would regret caging his wolf and coercing him. If Harry didn't take care of him, Remus would. No one messes with his Pack and gets away with it. Remus smirked as he felt his wolf howl in agreement. Dumbledore would pay.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Remus lay down on the bed, sighing as his body relaxed into the soft mattress. It had been a long day, hell it had been a long couple of years. He was overjoyed to know that Sirius was alive and well, and that Harry's condition had been exaggerated. On the down side, he couldn't get over the fact that Dumbledore was a cold manipulative, evil man. The things that he had done to Sirius, Harry, Severus and himself made him go cold.

Remus turned over and stared out the window. The stars were bright, and they twinkled with a cold light. What was this world coming to when the man everyone thought of as a savior, wasn't? What would happen if Dumbledore decided to take over the Wizarding World? Could their world hold up against two powerful men, bent on destroying each other and any who would stand in their way?

It sickened him to know that Voldemort, a.k.a. Tom Riddle, was Dumbledore's son. How could a man treat his child that way? All for the sake of power? He couldn't get past that. He loved children, and he was envious of those who had their own. He would love to have kids, but he was afraid of transmitting the Werewolf disease to anyone, even his children. There was always a fifty-fifty chance of any child being born a werewolf if one of its parents was a werewolf. He couldn't live with himself if he inflicted that on anyone, let alone a child.

A knock on the door drew him out of his thoughts. "Come in," he called out.

The door open and Sirius bounced in. He shut the door and walked over to the bed, flounced down and grinned at him. "Hey, Moony. How's it hanging?" he asked.

Remus smiled at his best friend and replied, "To the left, my good man, to the left."

Sirius laughed exuberantly. He lay on his back and sighed heavily. They laid there in the darkness and enjoyed just being together again.

"Padfoot," Remus began hesitantly.

"Yeah?" Sirius replied.

"What's going on with you and Severus?" he asked.

"Ewww...nothing," Sirius exclaimed, horror covering his face.

Remus smacked him on the arm. "Not that, you prat. I meant, why are you two getting along so well?" he asked.

Sirius snickered. "Oh, that," he drawled. "Not much. We just decided to call a truce. It seems a certain insane Headmaster manipulated many of the things that happened while we were in Hogwarts. Once we realized that, we decided to expand on the friendship we would've had if Dumbledore hadn't interfered."

"Ah," Remus commented.

Sirius rolled over and looked at him curiously. "Why? Does that bother you? You were the one who said that we should try to put aside our differences and get along. Have you changed your mind?" he asked.

Remus sighed. "No, I haven't changed my mind. It's just..." he trailed off.

"Yeah? What?" Sirius asked impatiently.

"It's just everything's changed. Our enemy is our friend, our friend is our enemy. Ron is no longer a Weasley but a Black. You and Severus are friends, hell even Dobby has changed. It's just...too much, I guess," Remus explained softly. "I think I'm going to go crazy if something else happens."

"Ah. Well, then you had better call up the funny farm, because Harry was able to do magic while in Azkaban," Sirius informed him cheerfully.

Remus sat up quickly and stared at Sirius, his expression shocked. "He did what?" he yelped.

Sirius grinned at him. "Our little Prongslet is a mighty powerful wizard. Did you know that he gained an animagus form, without the potion? He transformed in Azkaban," Sirius told him, his eyes filled with mirth.

"You're lying," Remus exclaimed wildly.

"I kid you not. Marauder's honor," Sirius said solemnly, his hand over his heart.

"Well, hell," Remus muttered as he lay back down on the bed. There was quiet for a few minutes before Remus asked, "What kind of animagus form?"

Sirius laughed softly. "A wolf. A large, beautiful silver wolf. We gave him the Marauder name Celevon. Dobby gave it to him. It's..."

"Elvish," Remus cut in.

"Figures you would know that; if I didn't know better, I'd think you were in Ravenclaw," Sirius huffed.

"Mmmm..." Remus agreed absently.

The room was quiet once more as they basked in the joy of being together. There were many times when they were younger that they would just sit together and do nothing, no talking, no reading, just lying there, enjoying the closeness of Pack. Remus could feel his wolf calming down in a way that hadn't happened in many years. He felt more complete, more rested. He frowned as he thought of Dumbledore and what he had done to his wolf.

"What are we going to do, Padfoot?" Remus asked seriously.

"About?" Sirius questioned.

"Dumbledore and Voldemort? It's too much for Harry to handle. He may have the power, but he doesn't have the experience or the

knowledge. Between Dumbledore and Voldemort, there is at least two hundred years of experience. Harry missed his last year of school. There's no way that he can do this," Remus explained.

Sirius sighed heavily. "I know. He needs time to learn, but you know that Dumbledore won't wait. If I could, I'd sneak the boy into Hogwarts and use the Room of Requirement. I bet you can stop time in that room. But, it would be too close to Dumbledore and Harry isn't ready for Dumbledore to know his true condition."

"Don't you think that he might have some idea now? We destroyed the block around my memories. Shouldn't that give him some idea that all is not what it seems?" Remus asked.

Sirius sat up and gazed down at his friend. He shook his head and replied, "I don't know. I would like to think not, but Dumbledore is crafty. I guess we just go with the thought that Dumbledore knows, that way we won't be surprised."

"Agreed," Remus answered. "Padfoot, I'm sorry I should have looked harder into your death. If I had, maybe I could've found you sooner."

"Remy, it's not your fault. If you had looked into it, Dumbledore might've just killed you. I'm surprised he didn't since you seem to cause him so much trouble. You had no idea what was going on with the old man. My death wasn't suspicious so why should you have thought any different?" Sirius asked.

"Actually, there was something off that night. Your scent wasn't quite right. I just thought it was stress or new cologne or whatever. I never thought that it was simply because it wasn't you. I should've known," Remus said bitterly. "What good are my heightened senses if I can't even tell my friend from an imposter?"

Sirius reached over, grabbed Remus's arm and squeezed gently. "Don't dwell on it, Moony. You didn't know. Dumbledore made sure of that. I don't blame you and Harry doesn't blame you," he murmured softly.

Remus shrugged. "I guess," he whispered.

"Don't worry, Moony. Somehow, we'll get through it. With our help, Harry will defeat Voldemort and we'll take care of Dumbledore. Things will work out in the end," Sirius said softly.

The room was filled with quiet as they lay on the bed together, each lost in their own thoughts.

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Severus read over the potion that Tiberus Potter wrote. It looked like it should remove the Dark Mark, if only he could figure out the missing ingredient. He frowned thoughtfully as he wondered what it might be. He had already tried many things, even though the journal had stated that they wouldn't work. He wanted to experiment, just in case Tiberus Potter had done something wrong. So far, nothing worked.

He needed something that would enhance the phoenix tears instead of diluting their effects. The unicorn's hair turned the whole potion into a lovely yellow color that would dissolve the insides of a man's body. He grimaced as he imagined the joy Voldemort would've gotten at finding a new way to kill someone. He had then tried a toenail of a gryphon, but that had turned the whole potion into some sort of sticky glue.

He had better luck with the shredded skin of a runespoor. That had changed it into a rather powerful healing potion. He tapped his lip with his quill, gazing across the room absently. He needed something incredibly powerful. He needed something that would enhance the phoenix tears and solidify the dragon's blood. Throwing the journal down in frustration, he sighed with disgust as he came up with nothing. He needed to find the missing ingredient. The ring that Harry had given him was a great help and he was thankful for it, but he wanted the freedom of having clear skin on his left forearm.

Severus rubbed his face wearily. He really should go to bed; the day had been long and rather strenuous. The efforts with the werewolf had exhausted him. If that blasted journal wouldn't keep him up all night, he would no doubt be sleeping now.

There was a knock on the door. "Come in," he called out.

The door opened and Harry came into the room. He made his way over to Severus and sat down in the chair. "Hey," he said softly.

"Harry, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" Severus asked.

"I wasn't quite ready to go to bed yet. My mind is still racing with today's events. Ron's in bed and Sirius is visiting with Remus. I thought I would let them talk since they seem to need it. I figured I would check on you and see how you were," Harry explained.

"Mmmm...well I too would be in bed, but I've been working on this blasted potion that your ancestor started. It would figure that another Potter is aggravating me," Severus snapped, his expression tired and frustrated.

Harry smiled. "We aim to please," he retorted cheerfully.

Severus sneered. "Yes, I've noticed."

"So, what's the problem?" Harry asked.

Severus gave him a sharp look. "Mr. Potter, do you really think that you can ever understand the complexities of Potions? You, the one who was rather atrocious at making even the simplest potion," he asked.

Harry shrugged. "I'm not even going to pretend that I understand it all, but it might help to have someone to bounce ideas off of, even if it's only to hear yourself talk," Harry offered.

"Yes, there is that. Very well, would you like something to drink? I have an urge for some tea," Severus said.

"I'm fine," Harry answered.

Severus nodded and called for a house-elf. A few minutes later, the house-elf brought Severus his tea. He sipped it slowly while looking at Harry absently.

"How does it feel to know that Lupin didn't betray you?" Severus asked.

Harry looked at him, his expression startled. He shrugged and replied, "Kind of a relief, but not. I told him that even though my mind knows that Dumbledore coerced him, my heart was going to take a while to get over it. I have a lot of emotions to get through before Remus and I can become friends again, let alone family. I don't know if I will ever trust him as I once did."

"I can see where it would be hard to," Severus said with a nod.

"Yeah," Harry whispered. "So, about the potion; what seems to be your problem?" he asked.

Severus explained how he had used the other ingredients and what happened when they were added. Harry nodded while Severus expanded on his problem. He noticed the intense frustration that filled the man's face as he talked. Harry knew how much Severus wanted to be free of the Dark Mark. He wanted it for Severus as well.

"So, the runespoor skin worked. Could it have some something to do with serpents?" Harry asked.

Severus looked thoughtful. "Mmmm...it could, but the runespoor is one on the most magical snakes in the Wizarding World. Anything else wouldn't be as powerful, well except maybe a basilisk," Severus mused. He began to look excited as he muttered to himself. "Yes, a basilisk would actually work. It would enhance the magical properties of the phoenix tears and solidify the dragon's blood, as well as imbue the potion with a pain relieving ability. Yes, a basilisk would do very well," he said excitedly before sighing. "Sadly, there hasn't been a basilisk seen in England for over a hundred years, since the Ministry banned them."

"What about a dead basilisk?" Harry asked.

"Excuse me?" Severus asked, confused.

"Would a dead basilisk work? I know they're magical, doesn't it take years before the body begins to decompose?" Harry questioned.

"Yes, it does. I believe their bodies begin decomposing approximately twelve to twenty years after their death. The body stays intact until the magic fades away – and for such a large and powerful snake, it takes very long time. Maybe I could check the Black Market. There has to be someone who has some basilisk skin. What would work the best is the poison from their fangs," Severus mused thoughtfully.

"Right. Well, then, I guess I know what needs to be done tomorrow. Is there any special way to harvest the basilisk skin and poison?" Harry asked.

Severus blinked a moment before looking at Harry, confused. "Yes, there is, but why do you need to know? I told you, there hasn't been a basilisk seen in a hundred years."

Harry smirked. "Another thing Dumbledore didn't tell you. What did he tell you about the creature from the Chamber of Secrets during my second year?" he asked.

"That it had been taken care of and Hogwarts was safe once again, why?" Severus questioned.

"Figures," Harry said with a snort. "The creature that Dumbledore was talking about was a basilisk. I happened to kill it and it should still be in the Chamber. It's only been six years since its death, so the body should still be in good condition," Harry explained.

Severus stared at him, a shocked expression on his face. "You killed a basilisk when you were twelve?"

Harry nodded. "Well, Fawkes helped. He blinded the snake; I just stabbed it through the mouth and into its brain. I did get poisoned though," Harry said. "A tooth got me right on the arm," he said as he rolled up his sleeve to show Severus his scar. "Luckily for me,

Fawkes was there to help out else I would've been a dead man...er...boy."

Severus sighed heavily. "The things you got up to when you were younger. I only knew that you had found the Chamber, the creature had been taken care of, Ginny Weasley had been rescued, that twit Lockhart had an accident, and Fawkes had brought all of you back," he said.

"Huh, figures. I guess Dumbledore didn't want anyone to know that the creature had been killed by a twelve year old child," Harry snarled.

"I'm sure that's part of the reason. How did you kill it?" Severus asked.

"I stabbed a sword through its mouth and into the brain," Harry replied.

Severus frowned. "Where did you get the sword?" he asked.

Harry grinned. "Fawkes brought me the Sorting Hat and I pulled out Gryffindor's sword."

Severus's eyes widened, "Gryffindor's sword?" he asked, shocked.

"Yep," Harry quipped.

Severus looked at him thoughtfully. "My, you are the epitome of Gryffindor, aren't you?" he sneered playfully.

"With a side of Slytherin," Harry trilled cheerfully.

The Potions Master snorted. "A very small side," he said.

Harry laughed. "So, you want to go harvest the basilisk tomorrow?"

"I would indeed. Hopefully, this will be the ingredient that I need," Severus sighed.

"I hope so too. Until then, you need to keep on wearing that ring. It's kept you pain free for this long," Harry replied.

"True," Severus said. They sat in a comfortable silence, lost in their own thoughts. Severus glanced over at Harry, who was staring at the fire pensively. "How are you doing, Harry? Really doing?" he asked.

"I'm scared," Harry replied softly. "It was bad enough that Voldemort was after me, but now Dumbledore will be as well. I'm not ready. I have all this power, and I won't even be able to use it because I don't know anything. Jelly-Legs jinxes and Tickling charms aren't going to defeat them, no matter how much power is behind them. I have to learn a whole year worth of spells, just to catch up with everyone else, and it still won't be enough. Those two know so many more spells than I do. I don't know what I'm going to do. There is simply not enough time."

Severus could see the fear on Harry's face. "I would like to say that everything will work out, but I'm not the type to give false hope. I don't know what's going to happen. We may all be killed. I don't know, but what I do know is that I'm going to help you in whatever way I can. You also have Ron, Sirius and now Lupin to help you in your endeavors. Not to mention the Watchers are on your side as well. Even if we go down, we're going to take a lot the bastards with us," Severus said fiercely.

Harry swallowed hard before nodding. "That we will," he replied. "I'll make them both curse the name Harry Potter before I go."

Severus laughed lightly. "I think they do that now," he said.

Harry grinned, his expression a little happier. "I don't know why. I'm such a good boy," he deadpanned.

"Oh yes, a good boy," Severus mocked.

They began to chuckle. "Thanks, Uncle Severus," Harry said softly. "I'm glad you're here with us."

"As am I, Harry. As am I."

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Tonks was sipping her tea, humming quietly as she skimmed through the paper. Things had been quiet lately. Work was getting boring, which in itself was odd. With Voldemort alive once again, one would think that there would be all kinds of things happening, but for some reason, the Dark Wizard was quiet. That made Tonks nervous. It could only mean that Voldemort was biding his time. He had to be planning something. Sadly, since she had broken off her contact with the Order, she had been out of the loop.

She frowned at the thought of the Order. She couldn't believe that Dumbledore had allowed Harry to go to prison. She never would've believed it, but she had watched, horrified, as those who Harry considered family, turned on him. There had been something very wrong about the meeting she had attended with some of the Order members. She remembered Remus's defense of Harry, only to have him change his mind. There was just something...off about it, but she couldn't figure out what. She had no proof, and there was no one that she could discuss it with. She only wished that Sirius was still alive. He would've done something. He wouldn't have allowed Harry to go to Azkaban, even if he had to kidnap the boy and made a run for it.

With things so strange, she had decided that it was time for her to disappear for a while. She didn't like the way things had been going. She was afraid for herself. With Dumbledore demanding that everyone testify against Harry, she couldn't allow herself to stay and be used against the boy. She had taken off and stayed with a great-aunt on her father's side. Dumbledore never thought to look for her in the Muggle world. She waited until Harry's trial was over before she came back. She broke off her ties with the Order and made sure that she was never alone with Dumbledore. It was sad to realize that she didn't trust the Leader of the Light.

She remembered the joy she had felt when Harry was pardoned and released from prison. The fact that she had been right had made her feel smug. She had known that Harry never would've killed anyone. She had briefly wondered about the friends and family of Harry's that had turned on him. How did they feel now that they knew that Harry was innocent? She hoped that the guilt would eat them alive. She

had been devastated to hear that Harry was catatonic. His stint in Azkaban had hurt him and no one knew if he would ever recover.

When she saw Harry at Gringotts, she had almost fainted with shock. She realized then that Harry had been lying to everyone. After a brief conversation with him, she had gone home to celebrate. She was happy to see that Harry was away from Dumbledore. She smirked as she realized that she was one of the very few who knew that Harry wasn't as incapacitated as he portrayed. It appealed to her sense of humor. She would love to see Dumbledore's face when he found out that he had been lied to. She only hoped she was there when he did.

Tonks was startled out of her thoughts by an owl flying through her window. It landed on the table and stuck out its foot. It hooted impatiently and Tonks rolled her eyes. Reaching down, she took the letter and petted the owl briefly.

Unrolling the parchment, she read it and began to smile.

Tonks,

I thought about it and I've decided to take you up on your offer of training. I realize that I need it more than ever. I need to learn how to control my sight.

If you agree and you have the time, I have someone who will bring you to where I am now staying. If not, let me know and we'll try at another time.

Me

Tonks laughed. As she wrote her reply, she grew excited. She would finally be able to see Harry again. She had so much to teach him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Dobby walked into the small building and looked around. He waited a moment before a small female elf walked up to him.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

Dobby nodded. "I would like to see Elder Kane if I could. I have a request to ask of him," he replied.

"Can I tell him who is waiting for him?" she asked.

"My name is Dobby," he said.

Her eyes widened and she took a step forward, her expression eager. "Dobby? The elf that is bonded to two wizards? The one who training to become a warrior elf?" she asked, excitement lacing her voice.

Dobby looked at her warily. "Yes, I am he. May I ask who you are?" he inquired.

"My name is Thyme, sister of Sage and Cinny. Sage has told me about you and Cinny says that when your training is done, you'll be one of the best trained Warrior Elves in centuries," Thyme exclaimed excitedly. "Oh, I must tell the Elder that you're here." She turned and bounced out of the room.

Dobby blinked rapidly, his expression shocked. Things in his life had changed a great deal in the last several years. Who knew that when he decided to protect Harry Potter -- a great and wonderful wizard -- from his former Master, that his life would take such a turn. He had thought that it couldn't get better after finally being released after years of servitude, but this, this was beyond what he had ever imagined.

When the Wizarding World had convicted Harry Potter of murder, he had been angry. He knew in his heart that there was no way that Harry Potter would ever kill anyone. He had been angry with Dumbledore for doing nothing. Harry's friends had turned their backs on him and left him alone. All except Wheezy, no Ron now, he

thought ruefully. It was hard to remember sometimes that Ron was no longer a Weasley and that his old nickname didn't work for him anymore.

He was happy when the Wizarding World had found out that Harry Potter was innocent and released him from Azkaban. When he had finally seen his friend, he had understood the need for Harry to hide his true condition. He almost broke into tears when Harry asked him to come along with him and Ron to the castle. The moment Harry had asked him to be his secret keeper; well Dobby had just about exploded with joy. He thought then that his life couldn't get any better than that.

However, he was wrong. He was now training to be a Warrior Elf; something he had only thought was a myth. He found a hidden world that not even the Wizards knew about. For centuries, a hidden community had been flourishing on the grounds of Potter Castle. Since the first elves' freedom from servitude many years ago, their society had flourished into a strong, stable community, hidden from the Wizarding World. The house-elves, once known as the Golodh or En Calben -- now only known as the En Golodh or the Exiled Ones -- were free and strong. They trained in many areas, as warriors, as healers, as leaders, as seers and as artists. What had once been a down trodden, beaten race had slowly become a thriving people. They were only saddened that those that were still in servitude didn't know about them. To insure the continuing prosperity of their community, they hid it to keep it safe, never telling any human. The Wizarding World would only destroy them if they ever found out.

It had been several day since the werewolf had discovered the treachery of the Headmaster. He had noticed that Harry was despondent, his face filled with stress as he realized that the time until the final confrontation between Voldemort and Dumbledore was drawing ever closer. Harry was studying hard, trying to catch up on what he had missed. He trained until the wee hours of morning, catching only a few hours of sleep, to wake up early in the morning and do it all over again.

Dobby knew that if Harry continued in this way, he would collapse before his first confrontation. What Harry needed was time. Time he

didn't have. With that in mind, Dobby decided to approach the Elder. He knew of a place that Harry could train, if the Elder would let him take Harry there.

He paced, waiting impatiently for someone to come and collect him. A few minutes later, Thyme bounced back into the room and beamed at him. "Elder Kane will see you now," she said.

Dobby sighed with relief. Finally. Now all he had to do was talk the Elder in letting Harry use the one place no human had ever been. Right, that should be easy. Dobby snorted internally and walked after the bouncy house-elf. They stopped at a door and Thyme opened it, stepping aside to let Dobby in. He nodded his thanks and stepped into the room as Thyme closed the door behind him.

He glanced around the room. It was very large. It was large enough for a human to stand comfortably. The walls were red and the wood trimmings were made of oak. There were large portraits done by an elf artisan, one dedicated to Morrigan Potter, the woman who had freed the house-elves so long ago. Dobby heard a noise and glanced around. He saw a very old elf standing by the window, gazing out into the lovely courtyard beyond.

Dobby waited patiently. He knew that he couldn't rush this interview, not if he wanted to get permission for Harry to use the training cave. The old elf turned and looked at him appraisingly. He walked over to him slowly, his eyes filled with wisdom and warmth. Dobby felt a sense of peace and safety flow over him as he gazed into those large eyes.

"Thyme tells me that you are Dobby, son of Ginger and Talbot, widowed mate to Emmy. You are new to this place, yet you have already bonded with two wizards, powerful ones at that. You are also training to be a Warrior Elf and from what I hear, you will be one of the best in the last hundred years. Your courage, power and strength will take you far. So, tell me, Dobby, what can I do for you?" the Elder asked.

Dobby took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "As you know, things in the Wizarding World are becoming tense. There is the Dark Lord,

which the Wizards know about. He has been causing mayhem in their world for years. Harry Potter defeated him once when he was but a child, but sadly, the man was reborn and has continued his quest for power. What the Wizarding World doesn't know is about the other Dark Lord. Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, is not what he seems. He is in fact Voldemort's father. He is just as evil as his son is, if not more so and only a few people in the Wizarding World know about it. Harry Potter is prophesized to be the one to defeat the Dark Lord, but because of the machinations of the first Dark Lord, he was thrown into the Wizarding World prison and has missed out on his last year of schooling," Dobby explained.

Elder Kane frowned slightly. "Though we are hidden from the Wizarding World, we do have our sources as to what has been going on there. If you are correct in this, then the fate of the Wizarding World is very grave. Though it concerns me to an extent, why should we care about the fate of the world that is keeping our cousins in servitude? If they are destroyed, we have one less thing to worry about," he said.

Dobby repressed the growl of frustration that wanted to escape and shook his head. "That is where you are wrong. If the Dark Lord, or Dumbledore, gains power over the Wizarding World, then it will only be a matter of time before he begins to look for more power. While our society is hidden, there are still ways to find it. If the Dark Lord is the one to gain power, what will stop him from destroying our cousins? They are nothing more than cattle to them. We cannot allow this to happen," Dobby cried out passionately.

Elder Kane sighed and sat down. "What can we do? As you said, they think of us as nothing more than cattle. How can we protect them?" he asked, his expression weary. "It has been the concern of the Council that if the Dark Lord does indeed gain power, then our society would be in danger. But, we don't know where to go from here," he said.

"Then we fight," Dobby said firmly.

"Fight?" the Elder asked. "How?"

"There are elves being trained in the way of the Warriors, as they have been for hundreds of years. Why are they training if they aren't going to fight? We are stronger than our cousins are. The Wizards have forgotten our true power. We would not fight alone in this. Once the Dark Lord and Dumbledore are defeated, we can take our place in the world, no longer having to hide away in fear," Dobby explained, his eyes blazing with a passionate fervor.

The old elf sat back in his chair and gazed at Dobby solemnly. "And who do we fight with? Who would accept our armies? The Wizards believe us to be weak and they wouldn't begin to understand just what we could do. As you said, they believe us no more than cattle. So, tell me, who would lead us?" Elder Kane asked; his gaze intent.

Dobby stood up straight and gazed at him fiercely. "Harry Potter can lead us," he replied, his gaze proud.

"Harry Potter? He is one of your bonded, correct?" the Elder asked.

Dobby nodded and the old elf looked thoughtful. "I see. What makes you think that Harry Potter would agree to lead an army of the Exiled? What makes Harry Potter any different from any other Wizard?" the old house-elf asked.

"Harry Potter freed me when he was only twelve. He didn't have to. He never treated me any differently than he did any of his other friends. I never had to wonder what he wanted from me. I never had to worry about abuse from him. Harry is my friend. He is a good and wise wizard. He has a friend who is a werewolf and another who is a half-giant. He thinks all magical creatures should have the right to freedom. He will fight and die for us simply because that is the way he is," Dobby replied.

The Elder nodded; his gaze thoughtful. "It is true that we have been training warriors since we were freed on the hopes that there would finally come a time when we could put their abilities to good use. Understand this, Dobby, if the Council agrees to this, we won't be able to hide any longer. The Wizards will know about us. Do you have that much trust in this Harry Potter?" he asked.

"I do," Dobby said firmly. "With the proper training, Harry Potter will become one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, Wizard alive. Along with his friends, I believe that we have a very good chance in defeating both the Dark Lord and Dumbledore."

Elder Kane sat up and gazed at him, his eyes intent. "Training?" he asked. "What training do you have in mind?"

"As I said before, Harry missed his last year at Hogwarts. He is behind in his magic. Power he has, spells he doesn't. He needs the time to learn, but with the Dark Lord and Dumbledore closing in, he doesn't have the time to learn what he needs. Therefore, I ask that he be allowed to enter the Cave of Teachings," Dobby requested quietly.

The Elder's eyes widened. "You want to allow a human into the Cave of Teachings? A place that no human knows about, let alone has ever entered," he asked, shocked.

Dobby shook his head. "No, not a human."

The Elder sagged, his expression relieved. Dobby smirked. "I wish to ask the Council to allow five humans to enter the Cave of Teachings," he stated slyly.

Elder Kane stared at him a moment before laughing. "You are a sly one, Dobby, son of Ginger and Talbot. Fortunately, I have been waiting for this. Sage is the daughter of my daughter. She has been observing this Harry Potter and his friends and she agrees with you. Harry Potter is the Wizard that will allow the Exiled Ones to once again find a place in Valar. The Council has approved your request. However, we will be asking your friends to take an Oath of Secrecy. This is non-negotiable. It is for our protection as well as theirs," he said.

Dobby nodded eagerly, a wide smile on his face. "Harry Potter will agree to this. I thank you and the Council for this," he squeaked with joy. His face reddened and he glanced down at the floor, embarrassed.

Elder Kane laughed gently. "It hasn't been that long since your powers have grown. You are still developing. Where the ones who are born free can access their powers as they grow, those who have been bound in servitude need time to develop and grow theirs as adults. Do not worry, Dobby, you shall be one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful elf for hundreds of years. That's what you get for binding yourself to two powerful wizards," he said with a grin.

Dobby smiled. "I'm glad. I want to be able to protect Harry and his friends. I didn't think I was going to be able to."

"That will not be a concern," the Elder said. "Now go, let your friends know of the Council's decision. May Vala watch over you."

Dobby nodded, turned and walked out of the room. He bounced down the hall and out of the building. He couldn't wait to tell Harry about this; it would be load off Harry's mind. With a happy grin, he made his way to the castle.

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Harry slumped to the floor, exhausted. Ron looked at him, his face filled with concern. He exchanged a glance with Sirius, went to Harry and sat down beside his brother.

"Harry, you can't keep doing this! You need to rest, take some time to relax," Ron admonished. "If you keep going at this pace, you're going to collapse."

Harry shook his head. "I can't, Ron. I have to train. I have to learn all that I can. If I take the time to rest, I won't be prepared when the time comes to fight. I have to do this," he replied adamantly.

Ron sighed with frustration. "What good does it do to train when at the time the fight comes, you collapse? You can't face them both if you're too weak to do it. You may need to train, but you also have to rest your body. We need you at full strength, and at the rate you're going, you won't be," he snapped.

"Ron, you just don't understand," Harry growled.

"Bullshit! Don't tell me that I don't understand. You're not the only one that Dumbledore has betrayed. He betrayed Sirius, Remus, Severus and even me to an extent. I'm just as angry as you are. I've seen the same things that you have. I'm in this as much as you are. I'm going to help you fight both Voldemort and Dumbledore. I want to be there when it happens. I know that I need to learn as much as you do, but damn it, I also know that you can't fight like this. You need rest! If you don't, Voldemort and Dumbledore won't have to worry about killing you. You're doing it for them," Ron yelled, his face red with anger.

Harry looked at his brother and sighed. "You're right. I don't want to give them the satisfaction of killing myself. I want to be able to brag that I brought down the two darkest wizards of our time. I want the publicity, the accolades, the fan girls," he said mischievously.

Ron snorted. "Yeah, right. You hate those things, Harry. I, on the other hand, will enjoy having the women throwing themselves at me," he said with a grin.

They exchanged grins and Harry closed his eyes. He was exhausted after being put through his paces by his trainers. He took everything that Severus, Sirius and Remus threw at him, and then he went to the castle's library and researched. He proceeded to train himself whenever he wasn't with the others.

So far, they learned that he had an almost infinite well of power. He could do many spells without exhausting himself. He trained himself using his wand and the wandless magic that he had used in Azkaban. However, after many days of training and dueling, his power levels were nearly empty. He was burning himself out. He needed time to rest, he knew he did, but the sense of urgency had been increasing every day. He needed to learn as much as he could. Sadly, it still wasn't enough.

Severus taught him potions. While Harry would never be a Master at potions, he did do better than he had at Hogwarts. Without Severus breathing down his neck, or the Slytherins sabotaging his potions, it became easy to learn. Severus was mildly impressed, but he still managed to insult Harry's potions ability. Harry shook his head, no

matter how much Severus mellowed; he would always look down on those who couldn't brew potions at a Masters level.

Luckily, Harry only needed to know enough to pass his N.E.W.T.s. He had no plans to become a Potions Master, and if he wanted to learn more after Voldemort and Dumbledore's were defeated, then he would study. That had been all right with Severus, as it gave him more time to research the Dark Mark potion. Harry had taken Severus to the Chamber and they had harvested the Basilisk. The Potions Master had been euphoric at the sight of the dead snake. They had only taken as much as they needed, but Severus was adamant that once they took care of Voldemort and Dumbledore, they would harvest and sell the Basilisk remains. Harry had agreed and even offered to give Severus the Basilisk, stating that he didn't need the money. Severus refused and decided that they would do it together. He said that Harry could do whatever he wanted with the money, but he couldn't just take the snake from Harry. He had the right to the basilisk since he was the one who had killed it. Harry decided that whatever money he made from the basilisk would be placed in his own vault, and he would decide what to do with it then.

Severus had taken to disappearing to his lab for many hours. Dobby would have to drag him out of his lab so that he would eat something. Every day, one could hear Severus yelling at Dobby for interrupting his important work. The house-elf ignored it and kept on doing it. He was adamant that his friends were going to be taken care of, even if he had to force them. Harry had been amused to see a pouting Potions Master eating with a stubborn house-elf glaring at him all the while.

It had only been a couple of days ago when Severus had run into the room, his robes stained with potions, his hair greasy and wild and his eyes triumphant. He had finally found the correct amount of basilisk venom and scales that were needed in the potion. The Dark Mark Removal potion was a success. After that grand announcement, Severus had smiled a goofy grin and collapsed with exhaustion. He slept for twenty-four hours before getting up and running back down to his lab. Even though Severus was successful in finding the correct ingredients, he would still need almost a month to brew the potion.

Harry knew that the only time he would see Severus would be when he would be teaching him the Dark Arts.

Sirius and Remus had been teaching him the Light and border-Dark spells that they knew. As much as they didn't like it, they knew that Harry needed to know more than that. Severus was a veritable font of information and gladly taught Harry what he knew. What Severus, Sirius and Remus didn't know, Harry would look up in the castle library. Severus had even visited his hidden family library for some obscure books with spells that hadn't been heard of for generations.

His lessons with Tonks has been going well. He was learning to control his Magical Sight. He could now see the auras around many living beings, magical artefacts and he could see the faint outline of a spell when it was cast. Tonks had been delighted when she had gotten an owl, inviting her to the castle. Once she saw Sirius, she had began to cry and Sirius had hugged her until she calmed down. She'd been furious when she found out that Dumbledore had kept him prisoner since his supposed death. And when she found out what had happened to Remus, she went silent, her eyes cold, before promising that she would help in whatever way she could. Harry had yet to tell her the truth about Voldemort. He was still leery about telling anyone that. For Tonks, it was because of her safety. If, for some reason, if she were to bump into Dumbledore, he didn't want her to have the knowledge in her head. Who knew what Dumbledore would do to her.

Even with all the help, there wasn't enough time to learn everything. They had to pick and choose what Harry needed to learn. He didn't have the time to learn the spells that interested him; he needed to learn the spells that would aide him in his fight. He was tired, so very tired and his body was exhausted. He needed to rest, but he was scared to. He needed to push on, needed to train more, learn more. Merlin, he just wanted to rest.

"Prongslet, Ron is right. You need to rest, if only for a day. You're draining yourself of your magic. If Voldemort or Dumbledore were to attack you right now, they could defeat you easily. You're exhausted," Sirius reiterated.

"All right," Harry snapped. "I get it. I need to rest. Fine, I'll rest. You guys are worse than a bunch of nagging old biddies."

"Oi! I resent that," Ron replied.

Harry snorted. "Doesn't make it any less true," he said with a tired smile.

"Whatever," Ron replied with an indignant sniff. "I'm hungry. Let's go eat," he said eagerly.

Harry laughed. "All right. Help me up, would you? I don't think my body wants to move," he whimpered.

"Baby," Ron teased as he helped Harry to his feet.

"You're being mean," Harry whined.

Ron nodded. "Yes, I am. It's allowed, hell it's encouraged. It says so in the Brother's Handbook," he replied sagely.

Harry looked at him warily. "There's a Brother's Handbook?" he asked.

"Yep. Every brother has one," Ron said.

"Why don't I have one? I'm your brother now," Harry asked. There was still a lot that he didn't know about the Wizarding World, even after all these years.

"Mmm...must've gotten lost in the post," Ron mused.

Harry could hear Sirius snickering and turned to look at his godfather suspiciously. Sirius couldn't help it. He began to laugh at Harry's expression. Harry scowled and looked back at Ron. His brother was grinning smugly and Harry knew that he had been had. Harry punched Ron in the arm.

"Ow!" Ron yelped. "Why did you hit me?" he pouted.

"Because you're a prat," Harry replied.

"Maybe, but you should've seen your face. A Brother's Handbook, indeed." Ron snorted with amusement.

"I hate you," Harry said solemnly. His tone was belied by the humor that danced in his eyes.

"That's all right. You're supposed to. It's in the Handbook," Ron sing-songed as he walked out of the room

"Prat," Harry mumbled as he shook his head with exasperation.

"You have to admit, it was pretty funny," Sirius piped up.

"Mmm...it only worked because there still so much about the Wizarding World that I don't know about. Hell, for all I know, every brother could have a handbook. Who's to say any differently," Harry replied.

Sirius chuckled. "You'll learn. If Dumbledore hadn't imprisoned me, I would've helped you with that. I'm not surprised the old goat didn't teach you anything that you needed to know. I'm certain he didn't want you to know the whats and wherefores of the Wizarding World. That would allow you too much freedom," he muttered darkly.

Harry sighed. "True."

"Enough of that, let's go eat," Sirius said cheerfully.

Harry nodded and followed his godfather out of the room.

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The day passed slowly. After lunch, Harry went back to training. This time he slowed down, and reviewed what he had already learned to make sure that he had gotten it right. Ron dueled with him for an hour before Harry resumed researching for another couple of hours.

Harry looked up when he heard someone enter the room. He was surprised to see the Potions Master standing in the doorway of the library.

"Hey. Is everything okay?" Harry asked.

"Yes. The potion needs to simmer for a couple of hours before I add the beetle eyes. I thought I would use the time to teach you some more if you are available," Severus replied.

Harry sighed. "As much as I would love to, I have promised Ron and Sirius that I would rest. So that means no more dueling for a couple of days. All I can do is research these old books and hope I find something that will take care of Voldemort."

"Ah," Severus murmured. He sat down at the table and opened a book titled Everyday Spells and Their Uses. He frowned as he skimmed through the book. He snorted, slammed the book shut and stared at Harry. "This book is useless. The spells listed here are something you would learn in your third year at Hogwarts. Pathetic," he snapped.

Harry chuckled. "I haven't got to it yet, but thank you, that's one less book I'll have to search through. You know, these are the times that I wished I didn't hate Hermione. She was the best when it came to research," he sighed.

"Maybe, but unfortunately, she is also the lap dog of the Headmaster," Severus said snidely.

Harry's eyes filled with anger and pain before replying, "Yeah, she is."

"Have you seen Dobby?" Severus asked suddenly.

Harry looked up from his book and frowned, his expression confused. "Er...no, why?" he asked.

Severus shrugged. "No reason. I just realized that I haven't seen him all day," he muttered.

Harry stared at Severus bemusedly. Severus had sounded almost ... concerned about the missing house-elf. Harry thought a moment then frowned as he realized that he hadn't seen Dobby all day either. That was strange. Dobby never left without telling someone where he was going. Harry wasn't too concerned, as he knew that Dobby had the ability to take care of himself, it was just strange that he hadn't popped in to see him today.

"Huh. You know, I just realized that I haven't seen Dobby all day either. That's a tad odd," Harry commented.

"Yes, well I was expecting him to come tearing into my lab today and drag me out of for lunch, but he never did. I thought maybe he had finally realized that he couldn't make me do anything I don't want to do," Severus mused thoughtfully.

Harry snorted, trying to repress the laugh that wanted to burst out. Severus was deluding himself if he thought that Dobby never made him do anything that he didn't want to. Nobody in this castle got away with not doing anything Dobby said. The house-elf might be small, but he was scary when he didn't get his own way. He was concerned about taking care of everyone in the castle and if he thought someone wasn't taking care of himself, then he nagged and threatened them until they did. They always gave into Dobby as the little house-elf had the power to back up his threats.

Harry cleared his throat and said, "Yes, well, I'm sure he's fine."

"Mmm...yes, I'm sure," Severus mumbled, his expression definitely concerned.

Harry shook his head. He never thought he would see the day that Severus would show concern for anyone, let alone a house-elf. However, things had changed since Harry had freed Severus from his oaths and the servitude of his two masters. The Potions Master had opened up and he wasn't so bitter and angry. Harry knew that he had a special fondness for Dobby. Severus enjoyed the house-elf's Slytherin qualities. There had been many nights when Harry had walked in on them talking about the merits of good and evil, the necessity of pranks, the best way to kill Dumbledore -- which was

frankly a little scary to overhear -- and, strangest of all, the best brand of scotch.

"If he doesn't show up by dinner, then we'll ask the other house-elves if they have seen him. I'm sure he's fine," Harry said soothingly.

Severus sighed. "I know you're right. Fine, hand me that book. The one titled A Treatise on The Usage of Love Potions. I want to see what kind of crap they wrote," he sneered.

Harry chuckled and slid the lurid pink book over to the Potions Master. They passed the next two hours in relative peace, only broken by the contemptuous mutterings of the Potions Master.

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Hermione stared at the papers in front of her. She couldn't believe it. The information that Trelawney had left for her to find, stunned her. The last weeks had been hard for her. The betrayal of Dumbledore and the rape of her mind had turned her into a different person. Her stupidity and arrogance had lost her the best friends she had ever had and she hadn't even known it at the time. Placing the papers down on the desk in front of her, she bent her head and cried.

Everything she thought she knew was wrong. Dumbledore was evil. He was no different from Voldemort; he just hid his evil nature better. No one knew; no one had a clue and those that did, disappeared, or died under mysterious circumstances. She didn't know what she was going to do. She wanted Harry and Ron. She never did something like this without them. They had always been together for their adventures, but no longer. No longer could she rely on them to help her. No longer would they come and save her as they had done her first year at Hogwarts.

"There, there, child," a voice said behind her.

Hermione jumped up from the desk, whirled around, her wand at the ready. She may not be friends with Ron and Harry anymore, but she had learned from her adventures with them. She was ready, in case something was going to happen. She froze when she saw Professor

Trelawney standing before her. The woman looked concerned. "Are you all right, dearie?" she asked.

Hermione lowered her wand, sniffed and sat back down. "How do you know all this?" she asked as she waved her hands over the papers lying on the desk. "How could anyone not know how truly evil that man is?"

"Why didn't you?" Trelawney asked softly.

Hermione swallowed hard. "Because I didn't want to. I thought he was the epitome of what a Leader of the Light should be. He was wise, powerful, a hero from a previous war. In all, he was the perfect leader. Why would I want to look below the surface and destroy all my illusions?" she replied bitterly.

"Indeed. Now imagine your attitude encompassing the entire Wizarding World. Those people out there don't want to know that their hero isn't what they think he is. As long as they can live their lives without interruption, they don't care what goes on. Do you really think that if Voldemort wasn't killing people, that they would care if he were in charge of the Wizarding World? No, they wouldn't. The only reason they are concerned is because he has no qualms about killing, and he does it on a grand scale. Dumbledore hides his perfidy and people are okay with that. Dumbledore doesn't disturb their lives," Trelawney explained.

"But that's wrong," Hermione cried out.

"Of course it is, but it's also human nature. Why change something that is working for them?" Trelawney asked.

"But, surely not everyone thinks that? There has to be someone who opposes that ideal," Hermione questioned.

Trelawney laughed. "Of course there are. I am but one of many who oppose him. Whether he hides his perfidy or it is outright, it's still wrong and he should be accountable for his actions. You have a decision to make, Miss Granger. Do you go back to ignoring what you now know or do something about it? Regardless of what you do,

you're now in Dumbledore sights. Magic herself has protected you and that frightens him. Your choice is whether to hide or to throw yourself into opposing him. Regardless, you are in danger. Dumbledore doesn't like loose ends or things he can't control and you're both," she explained.

Hermione was scared, but as frightened as she was; she knew that she couldn't ignore what she had learned. She was never one to back down and take the safe way out. She looked at Trelawney, her face determined and nodded. "I can't hide, not now. I may have betrayed Harry and even Ron, but I can't, in good conscience, hide from this. I'll do whatever I can to help. I hope that I can help Ron and Harry in the process. I know they'll never forgive me for what I have done, but I still want to help them," she said sadly.

"Very well, Miss Granger. Someone will contact you and give you instructions on what to do. I suggest you leave and find yourself somewhere safe to stay. Dumbledore may have held off doing anything, but I don't believe that he will be afraid for much longer," Trelawney explained grimly.

"Did you See something?" Hermione asked skeptically.

Trelawney looked at her a moment before laughing. "Miss Granger, I am well aware of what my students and co-workers think of me. To them, I am the ditzy, old fraud. I want them to think that. I am a very good at what I do and I am a true Seer, regardless of what I may portray. However, to answer your question, I haven't seen anything regarding you as of yet. I just know Dumbledore. Her power will not scare Dumbledore off for long," she explained.

"Her?" Hermione asked.

"Gaia, Goddess of Earth," she stated with a smile. She laughed at the shocked expression on the young witch's face.

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Luna opened the door to her house, entered, and looked around for her boyfriend. She tripped over some books that were lying in the floor. Cursing aloud, she kicked them aside, yelling for Neville.

Since that night in Hogwart's infirmary, where they saw Dumbledore raping Hermione's mind, they had been searching for Harry and Ron. They hadn't found a thing. None of the searches, magical spells, owls, or even house-elves could find them. Neville was losing heart, but Luna was determined that she would find them. Harry and Ron needed to know that they had friends. They also needed to be informed of what Dumbledore had done to Hermione, even if the three of them weren't friends anymore.

"Neville?" she called out. She made her way into the kitchen, and finding it empty, she began to check out the rest of the house. Finding it empty, she looked out of the window and sighed.

"Why do I even bother checking the house?" she muttered to herself. She knew that Neville only really felt comfortable in one place. Walking out the back door, she made her way to the greenhouse. Opening the door, she walked in and quietly called for her boyfriend.

"Back here, luv," Neville replied.

Luna made her way to the back of the greenhouse. She smiled when she saw Neville. He had dirt on his hands and there was a streak on his forehead where he had brushed back his hair. She laughed softly, and Neville looked up at her, a soft smile on his face.

She walked over to him and leaned in for a kiss. She was always amazed that this man loved her as much as he did. He was the best thing that had ever happened to her and she cherished every moment she had with him.

"What did you need?" Neville asked as he rested his head against hers.

She remembered why she had come home early. Her face brightened and she held up her hand, which held a piece of paper. "I know where Ron is," she said excitedly.

Neville's face lit up with excitement. "Really? How did you find him?" he asked.

She frowned slightly. "Actually it was kind of strange. I was working at my desk and I turned around to get some more parchment. When I turned back, this note was on my desk. I was suspicious at first, but well, read it," she commented as she shoved the note towards him.

Neville wiped his hands on his apron and took the note from her. He opened it and read.

Miss Lovegood,

It has come to my attention that you are looking for a couple of mutual acquaintances of ours. I have thought long and hard about this, and I have checked the motivations of your search. I have found that you and Neville Longbottom have no malicious motives for your search and hereby invite you to visit.

As you are a friend of our acquaintances, I would suggest that you keep this note a secret. You may only share this information with Neville Longbottom. If you should happen to share what you know with anyone else, you will never find our acquaintances again.

Please, be ready in three days at two o'clock in the afternoon. I will be by to get you. To let you know that this note is the real thing, I have included something that should alleviate your concerns.

Until later,

A mutual friend

Neville looked Luna and asked, "What was with the note?"

Luna held out her hand, unfolded it and Neville began to smile as he saw the small, gold coin that had been used when Harry was teaching the DA. He laughed joyfully.

"Neville, are you okay?" Luna asked, concerned.

"Yes, luv. I'm just fine," he said with a secretive grin. "I think I'm looking forward to our meeting with our mutual friend."

Luna watched as her boyfriend went back to potting plants, humming cheerfully. She frowned, confused, and shook her head. And people thought she was odd.

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Dinner had come and gone and Dobby hadn't shown up. Harry was starting to become concerned. He could see that Severus was frowning as well, slightly agitated by the house-elf's disappearance.

He was about to tell Severus to question the other house-elves when Dobby popped into the Den, where they had been having tea. Harry noticed that there was a beaming smile on the house-elf's face. He looked proud of himself. He wondered what had happened to make Dobby so happy.

"Where have you been?" Severus snapped.

Dobby's head whipped around to look at Severus and he frowned slightly. "I didn't know I had to tell you where I was going," the house-elf responded.

"Did you care that Harry might worry if you didn't show up? You've been missing all day," Severus growled.

Dobby stared at Severus for a moment before smiling widely. "I missed you, too," he chirped cheerfully.

Severus looked appalled. "I never said that I was concerned," he replied. "I was talking about Harry."

Dobby nodded sagely. "Of course you were," he replied.

Severus muttered something insulting about Dobby's lineage and the house-elf grinned. Harry shook his head and chuckled at the antics of his two friends. Ron was laughing, while Sirius smirked and Remus

looked bemused. He still hadn't gotten used to the changes in either the house-elf or the Potions Master.

"I'm calling a meeting," Dobby stated.

Everyone looked at Dobby in surprise. The only time they called a meeting was when something important had happened. Wondering what it could be Harry put his book down and gave the house-elf his full attention.

Dobby cleared his throat nervously. "As you know, Harry, your ancestor freed all the house-elves that she could when she moved into the castle. As the years passed, the elves had children, who were born free and their powers had never been repressed. One thing that the Wizards do not realize is that when a house-elf has been unwillingly bound, their ability to have children decreases. A bound house-elf can only have as many as two children, and only if their master will allow it. The house-elf population is not large in the Wizarding World. Most of the Wizards that have house-elves have had the family for generations. But the freed elves were able to have as many children as they wanted. So, they began to propagate and when their numbers grew large enough, they started a community of free elves," he explained.

Harry blinked with surprise. "Are you saying that there is a community of free elves out there somewhere? Dobby, do you know what the Wizarding World would do if they found that out?" he asked, concern written on his face.

Dobby nodded. "Yes, and so did the Elves Council," he answered. "So Tanner, the Elder elf at the time, asked permission to have the community hidden on the property of Potter Castle. The master at the time granted them permission as it was well known that the Potter family had freed them and he wanted to continue Morrigan's work. So Tanner and the Elves Council gathered together all their powerful magic users and developed a spell that would hide the newly formed community. After several days of preparation, the community was hidden behind a ward that phased the community slightly out of this dimension. No Wizard can enter the community unless specifically asked. It has hidden the free elves for hundreds of years now."

"Dobby, this is all very interesting, really, but what does that have to do with anything?" Sirius asked.

Harry rolled his eyes. His godfather was never one for patience. Dobby glared at him. "If you would be quiet, I was getting to that," he snapped.

"Er...right," Sirius replied sheepishly.

"As I was saying. The community prospered and there are now close to ten thousand elves. There are smaller communities for those who wanted to live elsewhere. The elves learned to become healers, warriors, spell builders, and many other trades. Know this, what I am telling you, no the human has known about for hundreds of years. The Potter that gave us permission to use his land, died with this secret. I'm trusting you to keep this to yourself," Dobby said.

Harry nodded. "I understand. I'm glad that you trust us with this secret. I do have to ask you though, why are you telling us this? We've could've lived here without ever knowing. You wouldn't give the secret away unless there was a reason," he said.

"I do. I approached the Elder for permission to allow you access to the elf community, or more particularly, a certain part of the community," Dobby explained.

Harry's eyes widened. "Why would you do that?" he asked.

"The Elder and the Council will allow you to train in our Cave of Teachings, and in exchange, the Warrior Elves want to fight by your side when the time comes. The Council thinks that you are the one who will free all of our bounded cousins and allow us to take our rightful place in the Wizarding World," Dobby explained.

Harry leaned back in the chair, shocked. "Why would they think that?" he asked.

"Several reasons actually. You freed me when you were only twelve. Even then, you were more concerned about what happened to me

than what is considered correct in the Wizarding World. You're friends with a werewolf and a half-giant and you have no problems letting people know that. You think that restrictions on all magical creatures are wrong. You have always been my friend and you've never treated any elves as the slaves they are in the Wizarding World. You mourned Winky's death. To the Wizarding World, she was a slave, nothing more than cattle, but to you and Sirius, she was a friend. Plus, you are the Boy Who Lived and lastly, you are a Potter. We are prepared to follow you into battle," Dobby said proudly.

Harry shook his head. "I can't allow that, Dobby. I don't even think I'm going to win this. Why would I want to put you and your fellow warriors at risk on an off chance that I might succeed? The Wizarding World would know about you. They would hunt the rest of you down. It's not worth it. I'm not worth it," he said.

Dobby crossed his arms and glared at Harry fiercely. "You are worth it, Harry. I would follow you anywhere. I would die for you. You're my friend and you always will be. Why should the elves be any different from Remus, Sirius, Severus and Ron? They are going to fight beside you and so will I," Dobby replied adamantly.

Harry took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Why? Why me?" he asked quietly.

"Because you will win," Dobby replied simply.

Harry stared at Dobby, warmed by the depth of his friend's faith. He knew that Dobby had considered him his friend, but until that moment, he hadn't realized how much the little elf cared for him and believed in him.

"Thank you, Dobby," Harry whispered. He sat up, looked Dobby in the eye, and said, "I, Harry Potter, accept the house-elves..."

"The En Golodh or the Exiled Ones," Dobby cut in.

"Excuse me?" Harry asked, confused.

"We are not the house-elves. That is the name given to us by the Wizarding World. We are called the En Golodh, or the Exiled Ones," Dobby stated.

"That's Elvish, isn't it?" Remus asked curiously.

"Yes, we are the smaller cousins of the Light Elves. We once had our own society, our own language, our own city, but we refused to leave this land and travel with our cousins. We were proud of what we had here and didn't want to leave it in the hands of Men. The Valar were angry by our decision. They prophesied that if we did not leave this land, we would become nothing, we would lose everything that made us Elves. We refused and our cousins left, calling us the En Golodh. Our true name has been lost through the ages, as has our language, our society, our city and our very identity. A generation had passed when the prophecy was fulfilled. The Wizards found our city and desired it. We didn't know any better. We invited them in and became friends with them. Alas, that was a mistake. The Wizards started to bind us to them without permission and thus we became their slaves. In retaliation, the few free elves used their magic to hide the city and the Wizards were angry. They killed many elves before taking their slaves and leaving. It is said that the city is waiting, ready to be filled again with the sounds of the En Golodh," Dobby said wistfully. "We have been waiting for thousands of years to find that city, but it remains lost."

"How do you know this if your language has been destroyed?" Remus asked.

"It's the story that is passed down to every elf, so that we do not forget what happened. Elves, both free and bound, learn it before they can walk," Dobby replied.

"That's sad," Harry murmured softly.

"Yes, but we live in hope," Dobby answered.

"All right. I, Harry Potter, accept the En Golodh as my allies in the war against Voldemort and Dumbledore. In return, all En Golodh that are

unwillingly bound shall be set free to take their rightful place among the Wizards. So mote it be," Harry intoned.

There was a flare of magic, soft laughter in the air and a musical voice whispered, "So mote it be."

All the Wizards in the room sucked in shocked breaths. Dobby bounced on his knees, excitement written on his face. "The Valar!" he squeaked excitedly. "The Valar have given us their approval."

Harry blinked. "Er...right," he said hesitantly.

There was a laugh behind him and Harry whirled around, his wand out. Rose floated into the room, a smile on her face. "Rose, don't do that," Harry whined. "What are you doing here?"

"Greetings, young Harry. I felt the Magic in the room and came to see what was going on," she explained.

"Magic? Er...I think that had to do with the Oath, maybe," Harry replied cautiously.

"That may have been part of it, but she doesn't usually appear to those taking a vow. Something very monumental must have happened tonight," Rose said.

"The En Golodh are going to fight along side Harry Potter," Dobby exclaimed proudly.

There was shock and surprise on Rose's face. "Are they indeed? Well, this is a monumental occasion. No wonder the Magic wanted to show her approval. She must have a plan in place and your Oath is only part of it," she mused absently.

"You're talking as if Magic is alive, sentient. How can that be?" Harry asked.

"We call her the Magic, the Elves call her the Vala. She goes by many names, but I think you would know her as Gaia, Mother Earth, Goddess of Earth," she explained.

"But, she's a myth," Remus exclaimed, shocked. He looked around warily before turning his attention back to Rose. "Right?" he asked hesitantly.

"As are Wizards to the Muggles," she replied with amusement. "She is very old and she doesn't normally concern herself with humans, but there are times when she will interfere in how things are run. Wizards are her children, as are all Magical creatures. It pains her to know that they are not being treated as equals. She has hidden a few so that they would flourish, such as the Light Elves, but En Golodh refused to leave this place. They refused to be protected. She tried to warn them, but they didn't listen and they paid the price. She has watched for years, as the Wizards took control and enslaved the En Golodh and reduced the other Magical creatures to a shell of what they once were. She has finally had enough. There are two Dark Lords and they are causing chaos within the magic. She will not stand for it anymore," Rose explained.

"What is she going to do?" Harry asked.

"She is helping in her own way. She protects those who need it, and she gives approval when something goes the way she wants it to. Know this, whether you win this war or not, she will interfere. If it's not through you, it'll be through someone else. Her children will all be free, even if she has to destroy the Wizarding World to do it," Rose warned.

"How do you know so much about Gaia and her will?" Ron asked suspiciously.

Rose's gentle laugh echoed through the room. "Because I was a priestess in Gaia's service and because I'm a ghost. When you're a ghost, you can feel the magic all around you. You can even talk to Gaia if you so choose. Since I was in her service, I choose to. She wanted me to explain this and to let you know that she will be watching over you," Rose said before she disappeared.

"Well, that's just great. Another player in the field," Sirius snapped.

"Harry? You ok?" Ron asked.

"Yeah, just thinking about what Rose said," Harry responded absently.

"What are you going to do about Gaia?" Ron asked.

Harry looked at him, surprised. "Nothing. You heard what Rose said. Gaia will have her way whether it's through me or someone else. Frankly, if I'm dead, I could care less about what happens to the Wizarding World. Those hypocritical bastards could burn for all I care. I won't be alive to care. I'm going to do my duty. I'll face Voldemort and Dumbledore, but if I fail, I kind of like the idea that Gaia will be around to kick some ass," he said with a smile.

"Indeed," Severus smirked.

"What about us?" Ron asked harshly.

Harry laughed. "Ron, you'll be dead just as much as I will be. We all will be. Neither Voldemort nor Dumbledore would allow us to live. It would be stupid if they did," he said.

"Oh, right. Huh...hadn't thought about that," Ron muttered.

There was a moment of silence in the room as they contemplated what they had just learned. Remus shook off his thoughts, looked at Dobby and asked, "So, Dobby, what is this Cave of Teachings and why is it so important?"

Dobby bounced onto his feet, feeling excitement at the Valar's approval. He couldn't wait to tell Elder Kane what he had learned this night. "The Cave of Teachings is where we teach the young ones their skills. Some train in combat, others in healing, yet others in magic. But that isn't why I wanted you five to have access to the cave," he explained.

"Then why?" Sirius asked, his gaze curious.

"In a small, well hidden section of the cave, is a cavern that has been there for as long as anyone can remember. In fact, the caves were

built around that cavern. We call it the Cavern of Time," Dobby said, waiting for them to realize what that meant.

Harry was the first one to get it. His eyes widened and he stared at Dobby hopefully. "Really?" he asked.

Dobby nodded eagerly and Harry let out a whoop of excitement. Ron looked confused as the other Wizards in the room began to grin. This could be it. This could be what Harry had been looking for.

"I don't get it," Ron whined.

Harry whirled around and grinned at his brother. "The Cavern of Time, Ron! It means that time either doesn't work there or it slows down. I would have all the time in the world to train there, to research, and time would barely pass outside it. I could spend five years there, learning what I need, but a day need not go by here. I can get the training I need to face Voldemort and Dumbledore. We have chance, Ron. We really have a chance," he said, his face glowing with hope.

"Bloody hell," Ron murmured and Harry laughed.

Maybe they could really do this after all, he thought to himself.

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Golodh o en Calben - exiled of the light elves

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I have finished revising all my chapters now. The next chapter, 33 will be a new one. Thanks for your patience. Of course, real life has hit me once again and I start a new job on Monday. Things will be a little slower than normal, now that my writer's block seems to be gone.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

"Harry," Ron called out to his brother.

Harry stopped, turned around and gave him a questioning look. "Yeah?" he answered.

"I got a letter from Percy. He says that Lizzie has finally gotten you a meeting with the Head of the Watchers," Ron explained.

Harry's expression brightened. "She did, did she? That's great. When do they want to meet?" he asked.

"Percy says that if you're free later today, you can meet with them. You need to let him know when and where."

"Well, I refuse to meet them at the Ministry. I don't want to take a chance of Lizzie and Percy getting into trouble. I'm pretty sure that Dumbledore is having Lizzie watched, especially since he knows her opinion of him," Harry mused thoughtfully.

Ron nodded. "Good idea. So how do you want to do it?" he asked.

Harry shrugged. "I think Dobby should bring them here. Maybe pop them into a secure room until we figure out if they're really who they say they are. I doubt Lizzie or Percy will betray us, but they can be tricked just as much as anyone."

"All right, I'll let Percy know that you agreed to the meeting," Ron said. He smiled at Harry, turned, and made his way to the den to write his brother.

"Dobby," Harry called out.

Dobby appeared in front of Harry. "Yes, Harry?" he asked.

"I need you to go to the Ministry and bring back some guests. Be sure to pop them into a secure room. I want you to check them over for any tracking spells and any other spells that might be on them. Percy

has owed Ron informing him that Lizzie was finally able to get a meeting with the head of the Watchers group," Harry informed him.

Dobby nodded. "I can do that. What time is the meeting?" he asked.

Harry shrugged. "Ron said sometime today. You'll have to ask him when it is. Let me know before you leave. I still have to pack some things for our visit to the cavern," he paused and looked at Dobby with a gentle smile. "Have I told you how much I appreciate your doing this for me, for all of us?" he asked.

Dobby's face reddened slightly and he got a bashful look on his face. "I saw you practically killing yourself trying to learn everything you needed to know. I couldn't just stand by and watch you do that. I was just glad that the Council agreed to it," he explained.

"Well, regardless of the reason, I appreciate it alot. I actually have time to learn without stressing myself out."

Dobby smiled. "You're welcome, Harry. Now, I'm off. I have to run an errand for Sage," he said with a smile.

"Sage?" Harry asked, surprised. He was amused to see the small elf blush.

Dobby cleared his throat, a wide smile on his face as he said, "Yes, Sage. We have been spending a lot of time together lately."

Harry grinned. "Why, Dobby, do you have a girlfriend?" he teased.

The house-elf giggled and looked bashful. "We are just friends for now. The En Golodh have a long courtship. As of now, we are seeing if we are compatible. If we decide that we are, then we will enter a year long courtship before becoming handfasted. The handfasting will last six months. If by then, we decide that we are in love with each other, then we will bond. The bond will last until one of us dies. The En Golodh do not mate with just anyone," Dobby informed him.

"Interesting," Harry mused. "What about children?"

"Only a bonded pair can have children. Unlike humans, who can have children with any female, even if they do not love or are not bound to her, the En Golodh must be bound. Only when there is a sharing of magic between two elves can they have children."

"So, you don't...er...well...um...", Harry began to stammer. He blushed, his face red with embarrassment as he tried to find a way of asking the delicate question without offending Dobby.

Dobby looked amused. "The En Golodh can have recreational sex, if that is what you are asking. There just won't be any children from the unions."

Harry cleared his throat nervously. He grinned weakly. "Right, well, I hope things work out for you and Sage. I like the thought of little elflings running around," he said.

"As do I," Dobby replied. He nodded to Harry and disappeared.

Harry stood in the middle of the hallway, musing over the differences between elves and humans. Shaking his head to clear his mind, he made his way to his room to finish packing.

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Sirius entered the room and smiled at seeing Harry humming as he packed to go to the cave. He hadn't seen Harry this happy in days, and he'd be forever grateful to Dobby for getting Harry the help he needed, both in training and with the elven warriors the Council would provide. Sirius' mood got even better as he contemplated having the time to teach Harry everything he knew – he couldn't wait to get started.

"Hey, Prongslet," Sirius greeted.

Harry looked up and grinned at his godfather. "Hey, Padfoot," he replied. "All packed?"

"Yep. Are you packing everything?"

Harry shook his head. "No, I'm bringing several sets of clothes, some books, my broom, the pensieves that I found in my vault, and my wand. I figure if I need anything else, I can just come back or send Dobby to get it."

"Hey, did you ever ask Dobby about the time differences in the cave?" Sirius inquired.

"Yeah. He said that a year will pass inside the cave for every week that we are there. Imagine, learning everything I need to know in three weeks or three years, depending on how you want to look at it. I can't tell you how relieved I feel knowing that I have time to learn. Dobby even said that he would teach us some of elf magic. He doesn't expect us to learn much since our magic is different, but it should be enough for a distraction in a battle. Tonks and I have decided that we'll meet twice the first week we are in the cave. After that, she's going to be spending a week in the cave with us so that I can refine my Magical Sight. Er...week outside time. That's kind of confusing."

"That's good. I don't have a clue if Voldemort has Magical Sight or not, but it would be useful if you developed the ability to see spells as they are cast, or hell, maybe you can work it that you can see it before. It would be good for you to know in a fight. It's nice to have something up your sleeve. Hey, will we age while we're in the cave?" Sirius asked.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, we will. Dobby said that there is no way that they can get around that. Hell, the En Golodh live for several hundred years, a few years in the cave isn't going to make much of a difference."

Sirius smirked. "You know, while we're in the cave, we'll have to train you to fight without a wand. I think with the right exercise program, we can get you fit. Imagine Voldemort and Dumbledore's surprise when they face a strong warrior instead of a weakened boy. I hope I'm there to see their faces."

Harry laughed. "I think I'll enjoy that."

"So, what are you going to do after this?"

"I dunno. Did Ron tell you about the meeting with the Head of the Watchers?" Harry asked and Sirius nodded. "I'm not sure when the meeting will happen, but as soon as they get here Dobby will let me know. I guess I can fly for a while. I haven't really had time lately, what with all the lessons. I would help Severus with the potion, but I suck at potions," he said sheepishly.

Sirius snorted, amused. "Yeah, I really don't think Severus would appreciate your help. Is he staying here for awhile?"

"Yeah. He doesn't want to leave his potion. I told him that once it was done, he needed to come to the cave to take it. No one has ever taken it before so I don't want him to be alone. Plus, he needs me to take off the ring."

"Mmm..." Sirius hummed absently. "You know, I never thought I would ever be friends with Snape. After everything that happened while we were at Hogwarts, I was sure that we would be bitter enemies until the end." He snorted bitterly. "It's amazing what happens when you know the whole story. I never would've thought that the Headmaster would've manipulated us like he did, but then, I never thought the Headmaster would keep me prisoner for two years either."

"I know what you mean. I blamed him for your death, along with Severus and myself. No matter how hard he tried, after your supposed death, I didn't have anything to do with him beyond Hogwarts. I refused to learn Occlumency from Severus, since I blamed him as well. I had to threaten Dumbledore that I would write a letter to Voldemort and the Ministry, telling them about Severus if he forced me to take lessons from him again," Harry told him.

Sirius eyes widened with surprise. "I'm surprised he didn't try to force you. There are several spells and potions that can force someone to do what he wanted."

Harry smirked. "Yes, but I'm not affected by the Imperius curse. In addition, the other spells would be ruined by the Legilimens spell.

Since I can break the Imperius curse, I assume he thought that the lessons would weaken whatever hold they would've had on me. He wasn't happy, but he couldn't really force anything since he didn't want anyone to know about the lessons. Our relationship went downhill from then on. He didn't even pretend to be happy with me."

"What did Severus think?" Sirius asked.

Harry shrugged. "I'm not sure he even knew what happened. I imagine the Headmaster wouldn't want anyone know that a kid outsmarted him," he said, amused.

"Oh, he was angry, thank you very much," Severus replied, overhearing the comment. He walked into the room and gave Harry a mock glare. "I can't decide whether to be proud of your Slytherin tactics or angry because it wasn't the most delightful time after you told him no."

"Oh? What did he do?" Harry inquired.

Severus paused and frowned, his expression grim. "Let's just say that the Dark Lord isn't the only person to torture his minions with the Cruciatus Curse," he answered shortly.

Harry's eyes widened with shock. "He tortured you," he breathed softly. "Merlin, Severus, I'm sorry."

The Potions Master shrugged. "It wasn't the most enjoyable experience, but I have to admit that I found some pleasure in seeing him angry because of you. I may not have liked you, but anyone who could get one over on Dumbledore had some of my respect," he said, his gaze proud.

Harry blushed and looked down at the floor. He lifted his eyes shyly to Severus. "Thanks."

Severus nodded and Sirius gazed at them thoughtfully. This was something he never thought he would see, let alone be part of. Who knew that Severus and Harry would ever be friends?

"Harry, what would you have done if Dumbledore tried to force you to take the lessons? Would you have sent a note to Voldemort or the Ministry?" Sirius asked.

Harry looked thoughtful before nodding. "Yeah, I probably would've. I would've regretted it later, but at the time, I was so angry and grief stricken. I thought Severus was partly responsible for your death and I hated him. I would've done anything to make him miserable. I'm just glad that I didn't," he answered sheepishly.

"And I thank you as well," Severus said wryly.

Dobby popped into the room suddenly and smiled at everyone. He looked at Harry and said, "I'm leaving to bring back your guests."

"Now?" Harry asked, surprised.

Dobby nodded. "I'll be putting them into the suite on the second floor, with the angel portrait in it. Sage and I added some wards around the room and a very powerful locking spell that will only allow you, Ron, Sirius, Severus, and Remus in or out of the room. "

"All right. Let me know when you get back," Harry said.

Dobby nodded and disappeared.

"I wonder who the head of the Watchers is," Severus mused thoughtfully.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know, but I hope he or she can help. While we have the elves to help, I would like some actual Wizards as well. I wonder if I can get the werewolves," he wondered.

Sirius blinked. "Er...aren't the werewolves siding with Voldemort?" he asked.

Severus shook his head. "There is a small group that is siding with him, but the larger part of the werewolf community refuse to help the Dark Lord," he replied.

"What about Dumbledore?" Sirius inquired.

Harry smirked. "They won't help Dumbledore either. They don't trust him to help them with their cause. They can smell when someone is lying."

"Their cause?" Sirius asked.

Severus rolled his eyes and sighed. "You're friends with a werewolf and you don't even know about their cause?"

Sirius looked indignant. "Well, excuse me, but I've been out of touch for several years," he snapped.

"Out of touch is right," Severus mumbled.

"Hey!" Sirius yelled.

Harry shook his head. It didn't matter that Sirius and Severus had called a truce and were becoming friends, they would always mock and belittle each other. The only difference was that there wasn't an edge of hate in their voices. They did it because they each found it enjoyable.

"Their cause," Harry began, interrupting the insults, making both men pout at him, "is to find their place in the Wizarding World, same as the elves. They want the laws against werewolves to be repealed; at least the ones about having jobs, getting married and having children. Dumbledore made them vague promises, but they didn't believe it so they refused to side with him."

"How do you know about this? I thought you just got out of Azkaban?" Sirius asked, confused.

Harry sighed, looked at Severus and shook his head sadly. "I talked to Remus, Padfoot. While we may not be the friends that we once were, he is still a fount of information. I wanted to know what was going on in the world and with the Order. You really should take the time to talk to him."

Sirius crossed his arms over his stomach and pouted. "I talk to him," he whined.

"Yes, but this time, make sure it's more than just about the old days. I'm afraid they are gone," Severus commented.

Sirius sighed. "Fine, if I have too. I hate being responsible," he muttered.

"Really?" Severus inquired sarcastically. "Because I never would've noticed."

Harry snickered and went back to packing while Sirius and Severus continued their bickering.

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Tonks walked into the Den, an absent look on her face. Harry looked up her, concerned.

"Hey, Tonks," he greeted.

"Wotcher, Harry," Tonks replied absently.

"Is something wrong?" Harry asked, his eyes worried.

Tonks frowned a little. "I'm not sure. Mad-Eye hasn't shown up for work for the last three days. I don't know why. You know that he never leaves without someone knowing where he went in case something happened."

"Was he on a case?" Harry asked.

Tonks bit her bottom lip thoughtfully before shaking her head. "No, not that I know of, but then again, I don't know everything that Moody works on. It's just odd for him to be gone this long without any contact."

"Ummm...it does seem a tad odd for him. He's the most paranoid Auror we have. He's always been strict about checking in. You might

have to check around discreetly to see what's going on, but I'm sure everything's fine. He might be doing something for the Order," Harry replied, his voice a tad bit bitter.

Tonks looked at him, surprised. "Harry," she began softly.

Harry raised his hand, stopping her. "I know I'm not supposed to blame everyone in the Order, but it still bothers me tremendously that they did nothing. Surely, not everyone is under Dumbledore's thumb. I had to have had more support than just you and Remus. I thought after the lessons Moody gave me that he might've at least thought of me as a student, if not a friend, but I guess not."

"Harry, as far as I know, Moody didn't do a thing against you."

Harry snorted. "Maybe, but he sure in the hell didn't do anything to help me either."

"I'm sorry," Tonks whispered.

Harry sighed and shrugged. "It's not your fault, Tonks. It's just the way things worked out. It doesn't matter right now. I have other things to worry about besides the Order. So, did you get the time off to come to the cave next week?"

Tonks smiled brightly. "I sure did. I told them that I would be visiting Paris for a nice relaxing vacation. I can't wait; I have so much to teach you. I get to spend a year with you, Remus and Sirius. It should be fun."

Harry laughed. "Only you would think a year of training would be fun. You really need to get out more. Get a hobby, find a man."

Tonks looked at him slyly. "Why Harry, what makes you think I haven't? I don't spend a year with just anyone. Think of all the time we'll have together. As I said, I have so much to teach you," she said, her voice husky as she ran her fingers down Harry's face.

Harry's eyes were wide and panicked. He took a step back, looking longingly towards the door of the Den. "Er...Tonks...not that I don't like,

because I do, but um...well...you're really pretty, but I'm not...sorry, I can't...I don't..." he began to stutter.

Tonks waited a moment before she broke into laughter. "Oh Merlin, Harry. You're too easy," she cried as peals of laughter fell from her lips.

Harry sighed with relief before frowning, his eyes wounded. "You mean, you don't like me?" he whispered softly, his eyes on the ground.

Tonks stopped laughing, her eyes round. "Er...well...oh, Harry. I didn't mean...I'm so sorry," she said softly. Her heart clenched in her chest as she saw his shoulders begin to shake. She had just been teasing him. She hadn't meant anything serious by it, but she had forgotten his time in the Azkaban and the betrayal of his friends. She just hoped that her teasing didn't hurt him. She took a step forward to touch him when he raised his head as gazed at her, his eyes wide with mirth. His was biting his lips trying to repress his laughter. At her expression, he lost it.

"Who...is...the...easy...one...now?" he asked, barely getting the sentence out.

Tonks's face grew stormy and she stamped her foot. "Damn it, Harry. I thought I had hurt your feelings."

"Please, Tonks, I'm not that fragile. I know you don't like me like that," Harry said as he wipes the tears of laughter from his face. "Besides you deserved it for teasing me."

Tonks rolled her eyes before saying, "Maybe."

"Come on. Let's go get some lunch. I seem to be a tad bit hungry. I think I have to console myself with food," Harry teased as they walked out of the room.

"Very funny," an irate Tonks sneered.

Harry's laughter was heard as they made their way down the hall.

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Neville and Luna waited impatiently for their 'mutual friend' who would take them to Harry. A letter had arrived with a portkey that took them to unfamiliar house. They had been there an hour and no one had come. Wards surrounded the house so they could not leave.

Neville felt uneasy. He didn't like the fact that they couldn't leave the house. He had been stupid to use an unknown portkey. The letter could have been sent by anyone. Several of the old DA members could've told anyone that Harry had taught the club and how they were contacted. He was so eager to find Harry that he didn't take into consideration that it might've been someone other than Harry.

There was a noise at the door and Neville looked up. Luna had a tight grip on his hand and he could feel her slightly shaking with nerves. He patted her hand softly and gave her a wan smile. He gaze went towards the door and he sighed with relief when he saw Mad-Eye Moody walk through the door. He didn't have a lot contact with Moody, but according to Harry, Moody was a decent guy, if not a little paranoid.

"Mad-Eye Moody. I have to tell you, I'm a little surprised to see you. I thought for sure that it was Ron that had written the letter," Neville said.

Mad-Eye stared at them, his false eye whirling around wildly. He gave them a smile that looked more like a grimace, raised his wand and yelled, "Crucio."

The lessons from DA were still in his head and Neville responded automatically. He pushed Luna off the couch and threw himself down on the ground. He grabbed his wand.

"Stupefy," Neville yelled as he cast the spell towards Moody.

The old Auror ducked behind a chair and the spell missed. Spells were exchanged for several minutes and neither side got in a hit.

"Moody, why are you trying to hurt us? I thought we were on the same side," Neville yelled as he ducked again as a spell flew over his head. He looked over at Luna, who was peaking out from behind the couch, her wand in her hand. He sighed; she was safe; at least for now.

"You two saw something ya shouldn't have. I'm here to take care of a loose end," Moody growled gruffly.

Neville frowned. What did he mean? The only thing they had seen was...oh. Neville swallowed hard. Somehow, Dumbledore knew that they had seen him raping Hermione's mind. The uneasy feeling was back; He knew he couldn't win against the Auror. Mad-Eye Moody was known for getting his man. Neville worked at a greenhouse, for Merlin's sake. He didn't keep up with the fighting spells. He was going to die. Luna was going to die. Neville's eyes hardened with determination. Not if he could help it. If he had to die protecting his girlfriend, then he would.

He was brought out his thoughts by the smell of smoke and heat. He looked up and saw the chair he was hiding behind was on fire from one of the spells that Moody cast. With a yelp, he jumped away from the chair. He never saw the green light of the spell that hit him. He never saw the horrified look on Luna's face as she saw her boyfriend fall to the ground, dead.

She began to shake. Neville was dead and she would soon be also. Betrayed by a man who was on the side of the Light.

"Come out, lassie. If you do, it'll be all that quicker for you," Moody called out.

Luna swallowed as she decided what to do. With a small whimper, she came out from behind the couch and stood. Her face was defiant as she stared at the scarred Wizard. She didn't want to die, but she didn't want to live in a world that didn't have Neville in it.

"Good choice, lassie," Moody said as he raised his wand.

"You'll get yours, Mad-Eye Moody. Harry Potter is going to defeat Voldemort and Dumbledore and your time will come," Luna intoned her voice dreamy.

Mad-Eye laughed gruffly. "Maybe, but you won't be here to see it."

Luna closed her eyes as the Wizard raised his wand. I love you, Neville and I'll be with you soon, she whispered to herself.

"Avada Kedavra."

There was thud as a body fell to the ground.

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Dobby popped in the room and looked around for Harry. The messy-haired Wizard was sitting with Ron and Sirius, laughing. Dobby smiled as he saw the relaxed and cheerful grin on Harry's face. Dobby nodded to himself, glad that he had made the decision to approach the Elders.

He made his way over to the small group and cleared his throat to get their attention. Harry looked up and smiled at the house-elf.

"Hey, Dobby. Whatcha need?" Harry asked.

"Your guests are here. Mr. Weasley and Ms. Cameron, plus two others," Dobby replied.

The smile left Harry's face and a pensive look came to his eyes. "Right, then. Go get Severus and Remus if you would. I think its time that we talk to the Head of the Watchers. Were they clean?" Harry asked, wondering if there had been any spells on their guests.

"They were clean."

Harry sighed and got to his feet. He looked over at his brother and his godfather, a question on his face. "Well, gentlemen, should we greet our guests?"

"Indeed," Sirius said flatly. He had been enjoying the carefree moments with his godson and he hated to see the cheerful look disappear. He made a vow to make time for some fun while they were in the Teaching Caves.

The three waited until Severus and Remus joined them in the Den before making their way to the suite. Dobby had already gone up to make sure the guests were secure. A few minutes later, they reached the room. Harry opened the door and they walked in. Dobby was standing near the door, five wands in his hands. Harry smirked. Apparently, someone had an extra wand. Dobby wasn't going to take any chances with their safety.

Percy was standing by Lizzie. They smiled at Harry and his friends and Harry grinned. Harry looked past them and his eyes widened with shock. He couldn't believe it, but yet somehow, it made perfect sense.

"Mad-Eye Moody," he greeted a wry grin on his face.

"Laddie!" Moody replied, a smirk on his face. "I'm sure this is a surprise."

Harry laughed. "Funny enough, not so much," and Moody's laughter joined with his.

Harry's laughter trailed off as a figure stepped out from behind Moody. The person had a cloak on with the hood up. He couldn't see who it was, but suddenly he felt very uneasy. He stared intently as the figure stopped, and slowly raised his hands up to the hood. He pulled it back and smiled serenely at the stunned room.

"Dumbledore!" a shocked cry went out.

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Luna opened her eyes with a sense of disbelief. She wasn't dead. Why wasn't she dead? She looked over to where Moody had been standing, looking at the downed body with a sense of shock. What happened?

There was a noise by the door and she slowly looked over. She froze and began to weep as she realized she had been saved.

"Luna? Are you okay?" a worried voice asked her.

She continued to cry silently as she turned to look down at Neville's body. She heard a gasp of shock and small cry as the figure bent down to check him.

"Oh, Neville. I got here too late. I'm so sorry," she whispered. Hermione stared down at the dead body of her friend, her face filled with grief.

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(wicked laughter) This chapter went a totally different direction than I had originally planned. I like it though. Sorry about Neville. His death wasn't really planned until I wrote it.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Harry pulled out his wand and pointed it at Dumbledore. He couldn't believe it. Dumbledore knew where he was. He was here and there was nothing that Harry could do about it. He just wasn't simply educated enough in spells to defeat the old wizard. In his mind, he realized that his friends also had their wands out, pointing them at the Headmaster and Moody.

Harry felt a sense of relief and comfort. Even if he couldn't take Dumbledore down, he knew his friends might have a chance. He just couldn't believe that Dobby brought the old man here. He would've thought that the house-elf wouldn't have been fooled by anything the Headmaster did. Had Dobby been compromised somehow? Dobby would've seen through any polyjuice potions or glamours. So why had he brought the Headmaster here?

Harry frowned. Things just weren't adding up. Dobby would never make that mistake. Things he hadn't noticed before began trickling into his brain. He saw the looks of amusement on Moody and Dumbledore's faces. He also saw the look of amused exasperation on Dobby's. Harry blinked. He began to slowly lower his wand as he stared at Dumbledore intently. He sighed and shook his head.

"That wasn't very funny, Moody," Harry commented as he glared at the paranoid Auror.

Moody chuckled. "I found it to be extremely amusing, Laddie. It's nice to know that your reflexes are still good after your little stint in Azkaban."

"Whatever. And you, Dobby, I can't believe you allowed that," Harry said.

It showed how much the elf had changed when he didn't immediately begin to cower and beat himself up. Dobby grinned sheepishly, but didn't bother defend himself. He thought it was funny and he knew that the old Auror wanted to check Harry's reflexes. Moody started cackling.

"Constant Vigilance!" Moody crowed.

Harry sighed. He was surrounded by crazy people. He just knew that the gods were against him, somehow. He looked at Dumbledore and smiled tightly.

"Welcome, Dumbledore."

The old wizard nodded and smiled serenely.

"Harry!" Ron yelled. "What do you think you're doing? He's the enemy!"

"Really, Mr. Black, do you think that Dobby would bring the Headmaster here? After everything that has already happened?" Severus snapped.

Harry hid a smile at Severus's defense of the house-elf. The unlikely friendship between the two was a source of amusement for those in the castle. It was strange to find the man who never liked anyone defending one of the most downtrodden of magical creatures. Maybe there was sense of justice in it somewhere. Regardless, Severus disliked anyone talking bad about the elf or even alluding to it.

Ron blinked with surprise. "Then who is it?" he demanded.

"Aberforth Dumbledore, the Headmaster's crazy brother," Harry stated.

"I see my reputation precedes me," Aberforth said wryly, his blue eyes twinkling behind his glasses.

"Don't," Harry snapped.

Aberforth looked confused. "What?"

"Don't twinkle your damn eyes. You look like your brother and we know much of a fake he is," Harry replied, a frown on his face.

Aberforth's blue eyes dimmed and his expression turned serious.

"I guess we should sit and talk. I think we have business to take care of," he stated.

Harry nodded. He turned and scowled at his friends, who took the hint, and lowered their wands. He looked at Percy and Lizzie, their serious expressions lightening as the tension in the room dissipated. They smiled at Harry and sat down as well.

Harry took a seat next to Moody and called for Sage. She popped in with some tea and sandwiches. Harry thanked the house-elf and with a smile, she popped out. After a few minutes, everyone was settled, with a cup of tea and was waiting expectantly.

Harry looked at Moody, arched an eyebrow, and smiled. "So, you two are the ones in charge of the Watchers, eh? Why would you spy on your own brother, Aberforth?" Harry asked. "And you, Moody, I thought you thought the Headmaster was the best thing since sliced bread?"

Moody looked confused at the Muggle saying before replying. "Er...right. Well, you were supposed to think that. I was spying, you know," he explained, a smile gracing his face. "It would've kind of defeated the purpose if everyone knew how much I truly dislike the man. **CONSTANT VIGILANCE!**" he bellowed suddenly, making those in the room jump.

Aberforth chuckled before sighing deeply. "I love my brother, or the brother he was in his younger years. The student who attended Hogwarts and the Headmaster are two totally different people. He wasn't always the manipulative bastard that he is now. I have fond memories of the two of us creating mayhem and chaos wherever we went," he said with a soft smile. The smile disappeared and he continued on. "He actually was the kind loving man that he pretends to be now. He only began to change as he delved deeper into the dark arts. When he met Lizzie," he paused as he looked over at his old friend, giving her a sympathetic smile, "I thought that he might've found something that would take his mind away from the dark arts. For a time, it seemed to have succeeded, but then he started delving even deeper. His personality began to change and he became cold

hearted. When Lizzie finally left him, it made him furious. Not because he loved Lizzie, but because Lizzie actually had the gall to leave him."

Aberforth stopped and sighed before continuing on. "You have to understand that this is only hearsay and based on some of things that Lizzie and a few others told me. I never saw that side of my brother, back then. To me, he was still the boy I grew up with. When Lizzie came to me to tell me of the change in my brother, I have to admit that I didn't believe her. I thought she was bitter from the break up. I refused to believe her and to my shame, I ridiculed her. I took me several more years before I finally saw what she was trying to tell me."

"What happened?" Harry asked gently, sensing the sadness in Aberforth.

"My wife died."

Harry blinked. Aberforth had been married? The crazy brother who, according to the Daily Prophet, had a thing with goats. Harry had always thought Aberforth was an immoral person, who did things only for himself. Of course, the way things were going lately, maybe he was supposed to think that. Him and everyone else.

"Did Albus kill her?" Harry asked daringly.

Aberforth's eyes grew cold. "It wasn't his hand that killed her, but he had a large part to do with her death."

"Aberforth, you don't have to..." Mood began.

The old wizard held up hand, stopping Moody's words. "No, it's all right, my friend. It's been years since my Miriam died. I think its time for everyone to know about it. I met Miriam at some ball that had been held for some uppity-up that I can't even remember. I knew the minute I saw her across the room that she was going to be my wife. She was beautiful, not only physically, but spiritually as well. She has such a presence and a joy for life that brightened up a room as soon as she walked in. I decided that night I was going to court her and I

did," Aberforth said with a smile, his eyes shining with remembered happiness.

"I introduced her to Albus several months after we met, never knowing that it would lead to her death. Remember much of this I didn't know until I found Miriam's journal after her death. I never knew when he became obsessed with her, but Miriam wrote that Albus began to send her letters, declaring his love for her. He begged her to leave me and to run away with him. He even told her that he would court her as well, if she wanted. But Miriam was in love with me, so she told him no. She never told me about what Albus had been doing. She wrote in her journal that she didn't want to hurt me by telling me that my brother was trying to steal the woman I loved. If only I had known, maybe I could've done something. I'll never really know," the old wizard sighed softly.

"She was always polite to him when he visited, so I never knew that anything was going on. She wrote that she was afraid of him. She knew that there was just something that wasn't right. I guess it was intuition or maybe I was just too close to Albus to see it, regardless, I never knew."

Aberforth paused and took a sip of his tea. His gaze was distant. He was lost in his memories, of the best and then worst time in his life. Harry felt a pang of emotion at the look of intense sorrow that graced the old wizard's face.

Aberforth shook off his memories and continued with his story. "Miriam and I finally married after a two years of courtship and for three years we were very happy. It was the best time of my life. Our marriage was filled with love and laughter. Sadly, it didn't last. One night, I came home and found Miriam's broken body on our bed. She had been tied up, beaten, raped, and then killed. I was devastated. Not knowing what to do, I called Albus for help. It never entered my mind to call the Aurors. When he flooded in and saw Miriam's body on the bed, I remember the look of shock and rage that was on his face. Stupidly, I thought it was because he was upset at her death, later I was to learn otherwise."

"I was too devastated to do anything. I trusted Albus to take care of things. He insisted that he would do everything himself. I remember her funeral, but I don't really remember anything from before. I wonder if Albus messed with my mind, or slipped me more potions than just a calming draught? It's all very vague. I never asked about the man who had killed my wife, I never demanded to talk to the Aurors or even suggested that we find her killer."

Aberforth was gazing out of the window, a thoughtful look on his face. "Three weeks after Miriam died; Albus came to me to tell that Miriam's killer had been found, dead by his own hand. A note next to the body told of his remorse for what he had done and how he couldn't live with it. I didn't care. At the time, I was just glad that he was dead. I never thought to question it. It wasn't until six months later, while I was cleaning out our bedroom that I found Miriam's journal. I was shocked and outraged to find out what Albus had been doing. Miriam wrote that things had only gotten worse after we had gotten married. Albus had become obsessed with her. She was the one thing he wanted and he couldn't have. He stalked her. Whenever she went out, he would just appear. It got to be that she was so afraid of going out without me."

Aberforth laughed bitterly and shook his head. "I just thought she wanted to spend every waking moment with me and that she didn't want to be without me. Such a fool I was."

"You didn't know, Aberforth," Moody said. "You had no idea what your brother was doing."

"I should've known. My wife was afraid of my own brother and I never had a clue. I should've known," the old wizard stated sadly.

"After reading Miriam's journal, I began to put things together. Faced with Albus' obsession, things that I hadn't noticed about Miriam's death began to surface. Why did the killer pick Miriam? How had he gotten past the very strong wards that we had on the house? Why did Albus have her buried so quickly and why hadn't the Aurors come by to investigate her death? With those questions in mind, I began to search for answers. It would be another year before I found them. An associate of Miriam's killer told me that Albus had hired Orson, the

name of Miriam's killer, to kidnap her and bring her to him. The plan hadn't included having her killed. However, once Orson saw Miriam and her beauty, he had his own plan in mind. Once he raped her, he realized that he was in trouble. He knew just how dark Albus had become so he killed Miriam and tried to disappear."

"I realized then that the look of shock and rage I saw on Albus's wasn't for me, but for himself. He had wanted Miriam for himself. I think he planned on keeping her, maybe under the Imperius curse. I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure it didn't include killing her."

"How do you know he didn't want to kill her?" Ron asked suddenly.

Aberforth grimaced. "Because somewhere in that twisted little mind, Albus loved her. He wanted her and was determined to have her. Killing her would've removed her from his grasp and he didn't want that."

"Ah," Ron murmured.

"Do you need a moment?" Harry asked.

Aberforth sighed. "No, I don't. I might as well finish the story."

Harry nodded with understanding. He knew that telling this must be hard for the old wizard. He respected the fact that Aberforth would tell this to anyone, let alone strangers.

"Once I realized that Albus had changed, I delved deeper into my brother's actions. Orson's associate suddenly disappeared only to turn up later, dead. I began to pay attention to what my brother was doing and found to my dismay, that he was involved in slave labor, prostitution, the black market, and other illegal dealings. I tried to gather evidence to put him into Azkaban, but he covered his tracks very well. Especially once he knew that someone was watching him. I never went anywhere without a polyjuice potion or a glamour. I didn't want my brother to find out who it was that was watching him. As far as he knew, her death made me mentally unstable. I'd become a crazy man with an obsession with goats. He wasn't concerned that I was interfering with his dealings."

"I was able to find some other people that noticed Albus wasn't quite the person he portrayed himself to be. Together we formed a group that exclusively watched everything that he did. After he defeated Grindelwald and became the Headmaster of Hogwarts, we realized that in the Wizarding World's eyes, Albus could do no wrong. Those that spoke against him began to disappear or were silenced using other means. All evidence of his wrong doings began to disappear. Albus was very cautious and made sure that nothing that he did could be traced back to him. The Watchers had a hard time finding anything wrong, even though we knew better."

"When we found out that your grandfather found the evidence we had been looking for to put him away, we were excited," Aberforth told Harry. "Then he 'died' and the evidence was locked away. We thought that it was the end of things. Albus had gained so much power in the Wizarding World and there was nothing we could do against him. Several of our agents had gone as far as poisoning and attempted assassinations, but nothing worked. He had been prepared for the eventuality. We never approached James because we knew he was pretty much under Albus's thumb. Then we thought about approaching you, but you came with the same problems your father did. However your stint in Azkaban, and your break away from Albus gave us hope. We've been pretty much at a standstill until now. Lizzie told that you found the evidence that your grandfather hid. We have the evidence we need to destroy Albus's power and we can finally bring him to justice. He has been unpunished for far too long," Aberforth told him passionately.

Harry looked at him thoughtfully. "So, you think that I should help you? Why?" he asked.

Aberforth blinked with surprise. "Excuse me? What do you mean why?" he asked.

"No, really. Why should I help you? What is in it for me?" Harry demanded.

There was a frown on Aberforth's face. "Because Albus needs to be brought to justice and it's the right thing to do," he stated.

Severus snorted, while Sirius laughed. Ron began coughing, covering up the grin that was on his lips. Remus groaned and slumped into his chair.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "I'm sorry; you must've mistaken me with Albus's Golden Boy. Reality check, I'm not. There is nothing the Wizarding World could offer me that would make me help."

There was silence. Aberforth stared at him, his eyes wide with shock. Percy looked at him thoughtfully, a gleam in his eyes. Lizzie looked like she was going to have a heart attack and Moody's was grinning, his magic eye whirling wildly.

Aberforth began to sputter, disbelief shining from his eyes. "But...but..."

Moody suddenly started cackling. Harry looked over at the grizzly Auror curiously. Moody had a grin on his face and he looked at Harry slyly.

"Albus always did underestimate you, laddie. He never knew that there was Slytherin hidden inside his pet Gryffindor. I like you, boy. I always have. It does this old heart good to know that you're looking out for yourself. I was overjoyed when I found that you had broken from Albus, even before you were thrown into Azkaban. I have to admit the fact that you hid your condition and went into hiding with your friends, well that was truly a piece of work," he praised.

"I'm so glad you approve," Harry said wryly. "I'm sure I'll sleep better at night knowing that."

Moody chuckled. "Yes, indeed boy. I sure do like you."

"Just how are you involved with this, Moody? As Harry said before, I thought you were Albus' man," Sirius asked.

Moody gave the animagus a grizzly smile. "Aberforth approached me years ago. I had been the Auror that was investigating several deaths of some low level thugs. Their deaths were mysterious and there was

evidence that they were involved with something that involved someone in authority, but I could never find more than that. Aberforth approached me and informed me of what his brother was up to. I didn't believe him at first. I mean, the Savior of the Wizarding World, doing dark dealings? That couldn't be true, but as I looked into things, I found a lot of unanswered questions. A few frustrating months later, and a lot of dead ends, I joined the Watchers. My mission was to get closer to Albus, become his friend, his confidant, if I could. I had to find out as much as I could."

"So, you're a spy then. Does that mean the old paranoid Auror is just a front?" Harry asked curiously.

Moody laughed. "Not at all, I'm very paranoid. Just because you can't see them, doesn't mean their not out to get you," he said with a bark of laughter. "Oh, I have to admit that when I first started spying on Albus, my cover was just that, but too many years and too many Dark Wizards have changed things. If you think I'm paranoid, I have nothing on Albus. That man is ten times worse than me. It's been very hard to get anything out of him. I haven't found enough to pin on Dumbledore," he said.

"We need your help, Harry," Aberforth pleaded. "Albus needs to be stopped and if you have any evidence that can help, then you must help us."

"Please help us, Harry," Lizzie begged quietly.

Harry sighed. "What I have learned will throw the Wizarding World into chaos. There will be a war, but not the war you're thinking of. Instead of one Dark Lord, there will be two vying for power over the Wizarding World. If I give you the evidence, and you let anyone know, Dumbledore won't hesitate to try to take over. Voldemort won't stand for that and chaos will ensue. No one will be safe anywhere," he explained.

"Surely, it's not that bad," Aberforth exclaimed.

Harry looked at him solemnly and the old wizard swallowed hard, his expression uneasy.

"I'm not ready to battle either of them yet. I need more time, but once I'm ready, I'll take on Voldemort first. Once he's defeated, we can bring Dumbledore to justice, but not until then. The Wizarding World wouldn't survive two Dark Lords bound and determined on destroying everything in their way," Harry informed them.

"Why are you going to take on Voldemort?" Lizzie asked, confused.

"Simply put, I've been prophesied to."

"Are you sure the prophecy is even true, considering the source?" Moody asked.

Harry shrugged. "No, I'm not sure, but regardless if it is or isn't, I'm still going to battle him."

"Why you, though? If the prophecy might be false, why should you concern yourself with Voldemort?" Aberforth asked, his gaze curious.

"If not me, then who?" Harry asked impatiently. "You? Moody? The Headmaster? Anyone else in the Wizarding World? These are the very same people who have been sticking their heads in the sand, hoping someone else would take care of the problem. If they had risen against him years ago, Voldemort would've never been a problem. Instead, they cry out for a savior and when that savior doesn't do something they like, they turn on him. Please, they couldn't find their arses with their own hands," he sneered.

"But it's our job to protect you. You're so young," Aberforth stated.

Harry glared at Aberforth. "Good job you've done so far," he replied sarcastically. "I've had to face Voldemort every year since I entered the Wizarding World. I didn't have help from an adult; I had help from my friends. Thanks to the Wizarding World, I was betrayed and thrown into Azkaban for over a year. There was no one to help me. What did you do for me, Aberforth? How did you protect me then?" he demanded. Aberforth looked away, ashamed.

Harry snorted. "Frankly, Aberforth, I don't need your protection. I have people who I trust to protect me," he said as he waved his hand towards Ron, Severus, Sirius, Remus and Dobby. They smiled back at Harry, while turning their distrustful faces towards Percy, Lizzie, Aberforth and Moody.

Aberforth sighed mournfully. Moody looked at them thoughtfully before nodding.

"Leave the boy alone, Aberforth," Moody requested. "He knows what he's doing. I've always thought that there was more to the boy than what we saw. If he wants to fight Voldemort, then let him. He has just as much right, if not more, than anyone else."

Harry gave Moody a small smile which the grizzly Auror returned. There was pride on the man's face and Harry's face reddened. Moody chuckled.

"Thank you, Moody."

"You're welcome, laddie. You still need training. What I taught you before Azkaban isn't going to be enough to take down Voldemort. You're going to need more," Moody warned.

Harry grinned slyly as he turned towards Severus and Sirius. His gaze went back to Moody and he smirked. "I don't think that's going to be a problem."

Moody looked at Severus, Sirius and Remus and grunted. "Yeah, I guess it won't be. You just might survive, boy, you just might survive."

"That is all well and good, but could we get back to the subject," Lizzie snapped. She turned her glare towards Harry. "Are you going to help us or not?" she demanded. "If not, could you at least tell us what your grandfather found out?"

Harry was silent a moment before sighing deeply. "Look, I can tell you what I found, but you can't let anyone know. Not yet, not now."

"Why?" Lizzie cried out with frustration.

"I told you, damn it! This will rip the Wizarding World apart. They are not ready to hear this," Harry yelled.

"What is so bad that the Wizarding World can't hear yet?" Aberforth asked, dread filling his eyes.

Harry closed his eyes and begged for strength. Opening his eyes, he looked at Aberforth sadly. "Voldemort is Albus Dumbledore's son," he said quietly.

The room erupted into chaos.

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Hermione stared at the body of the man who had been a member of the Order. With all that she had learned lately, she shouldn't be surprised by Mad-Eye Moody's betrayal, but yet, she was. Her hand shaking with emotion, she reached down and checked the old Auror's pulse. Just to make sure.

Nothing.

He was dead.

She drew in a shuddery breath and looked at Luna. The young woman was gazing down at Neville's body, tears in her eyes. Hermione bit back a sob and reached out to touch her friend.

"Oh, Neville," she whispered.

A sob broke from Luna and she leaned over Neville's body, grasping it tightly. "Nevy, oh please, love...no!" she cried out. Her world had been shattered by a single green light. The one thing that mattered the most to her was gone. What would she do now?

Hermione pulled the sobbing woman into her arms and held her. The room was silent except for the sounds of sobbing.

The crying finally stopped and Luna wrenched herself from Hermione's arms.

"He will pay," she snarled. "If it's the last thing I do, I will make that bastard pay!"

Hermione was confused. "Who?" she questioned.

"Dumbledore," Luna bit out.

The bushy haired woman's eyes widened with surprise. "What does the Headmaster have to do with this?" she asked.

"Neville and I saw him that night," Luna explained, her gaze still on her dead boyfriend.

"Huh?"

"The night you were found outside of Hogwarts gates. Neville and I saw what that bastard did to you while you were in the infirmary."

Hermione took a step back, fear in her eyes. "You saw that?" she asked, her voice strangled.

Luna smiled grimly. "Yes, and somehow the Headmaster knew. He's trying to cover his tracks, that and we were looking for Harry. I had thought we were discrete, but he found out somehow. I don't know how, but he did."

"Harry," Hermione breathed, longing in her voice.

Luna looked at her sharply before settling her gaze back onto Neville. "We thought we were meeting Harry, or at least someone who knew where he was. He knew something that only a few select few knew. I never even considered that it might be a trap. We were wrong. I grew uneasy once we were here and no one showed up. We tried to leave, but couldn't. Moody came in and started throwing curses. There was no chance to do anything. Neville and I haven't kept up our training. It might've been two against one, but Moody is a trained Auror. We had no hope."

"I'm sorry," Hermione said. "I wished I had been faster."

Luna turned and looked her intently. Her gaze was suspicious. "How did you know to come here? I thought we were in the middle of nowhere. How did you find us?" she demanded.

Hermione sighed. "I wasn't looking for you. In fact, I had no idea this house was here. I was following Moody, after I saw him skulking around the school and acting suspicious, well more suspicious than normal. Since he was acting so odd, I decided to follow him to see what he was up to. I cast a tracking spell on him, and I'm glad I did, because he apparated and I wouldn't have been able to find him otherwise. I was coming up the stairs when I heard the fighting. I wasn't fast enough. I'm sorry," she whispered.

Luna nodded and looked down at Neville once again. She drew in a shuddery breath and squared her shoulders with determination. "We need to leave. If Dumbledore is indeed after us, then once Moody doesn't come back, he'll want to check it out or send someone else. We have to make sure that we're not here when he does. Plus, I need to give Neville a proper burial."

Hermione nodded. "All right. I can take Neville for you, if you want," she offered hesitantly.

Luna shook her head, a sad smile on her face. "No, I can do it."

She walked over to Neville, cast *Mobilicorpus* and walked towards the door, Neville's body floating behind her. She stopped as she passed by Moody's body, kicked it once, and walked out the door.

Hermione glanced at Moody's body thoughtfully before transfiguring it into a chair. After adding a preservation spell, she placed it by the wall. She didn't want to carry the body around, but she didn't want it to disappear, she might need the body later. If Dumbledore came to check the place, he would find nothing.

She took once glance around, making sure nothing was out of place. She noticed the chair that had been burned and got rid of it. With a satisfied look, she turned and walked out of the room.

It was silent. Nothing showed of the events that had just taken place.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Harry stared at a shocked Aberforth. He wondered what the old man was thinking. It wasn't every day that you found out that your nephew was one of the darkest wizards in years. Well, at least known dark wizards. Aberforth knew that his brother had changed, but Harry didn't think Aberforth knew just how cruel his brother had become. To deliberately get a woman pregnant, have her die, then have the child beaten and tormented just to make him more susceptible to darkness was more than Aberforth could probably comprehend.

"Voldemort is my nephew?" Aberforth asked hoarsely.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, he is. His birth was planned. Albus decided to gain more power in the Wizarding World. This was before he defeated Grindelwald. He decided that he needed a Dark Lord to defeat. Since there wasn't one known at the time, he chose to make one. He got Tom's mother pregnant, implanted false memories in Tom's stepfather and mother, and when she died, he began...conditioning Tom. He had his own son tormented for years at the orphanage. He actually paid the director of the orphanage to abuse Tom. As Tom grew older, hate filled him and he began to crave power. I often wondered if there was more to it than just the torment at the orphanage. After all, Dumbledore had to make sure that his plan was successful," he mused thoughtfully.

"Once Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald, he realized just how powerful he could become. He was ecstatic at being known as the Savior of the Wizarding World. He slowly gained more power and influence. I believe he wanted to keep that power and influence, so he made sure that Tom was well on his way towards darkness. Everything was going well until something unexpected happened."

"What was that?" Aberforth asked.

"Me," Harry smirked. He decided not to tell them about the prophecy that pertained to the descendant of Gryffindor who would bring the end to the reign of Dumbledore. Only a select few knew that he was

the Heir of Gryffindor and he didn't want anyone else to know. He would keep silent about it for now.

"You?" Aberforth asked doubtfully.

"Yes, me. Whether or not the prophecy about Voldemort and myself is true, and I'm beginning to think that maybe it is, I'm still something he hadn't expected. I defeated Voldemort when I was a baby. I became the Savior of the Wizarding World. I took the title and adulation away from him. It must've ticked him off something fierce. He left me at my Aunt and Uncle's house, knowing how much they hated magic. He wanted me cowed, he wanted me weak, and he wanted me naïve. He was going to be the one who 'saved' me from my relatives. I was supposed to be grateful, and for a several years, I was," Harry explained.

"What changed?" Percy asked, curious.

"Sirius's supposed death," Harry said tightly. "Everything Dumbledore did that year just felt...wrong. Once Sirius 'died', I lost it. I realized that Dumbledore was manipulating me, especially after he told me about the prophecy. I came to many realizations that year. So with Ron's help, I decided to take control of my life. Dumbledore was so sure that he had me under his control. He never expected me to slip my leash."

Harry was lost in thought. "He wanted to shape me to become the weapon that he yielded against Voldemort. He could sit back and let me kill the Dark Lord without getting his hands dirty. I'm sure that I'm not supposed to survive the final confrontation. After all, Dumbledore wants the power and the adulation that comes with defeating another Dark Lord. He can't have that if I'm still alive. Whether I died by his hand or Voldemort's, I'm not supposed to survive the final confrontation."

The room was quiet as they contemplated Harry's words. Lizzie looked horrified by Harry's revelation and Moody didn't look surprised at all. He must've realized it on his own.

Aberforth sighed, his eyes filled with sadness. "I knew that Albus had changed, but I never realized that he was insane." He gave Harry a grave look and said, "I can see why you don't want the Wizarding World to know about the information that your Grandfather discovered. The fact that the kindest, wisest, and most powerful wizard in years is mad would tear our society apart."

Harry nodded. "We need to take care of Voldemort first, and then worry about the Headmaster. We can't fight them both at the same time."

"I can't believe this," Lizzie whispered. "I can't believe what he has become. I knew he had changed, but never to this extent. I loved him at one time. I wanted to marry him." She shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

Percy slid next to her on the couch and drew her into his arms, trying to give her some comfort.

"All right, then we need to get you trained," Moody announced suddenly. "If you're bound and determined to fight Voldemort then you need to catch up on what you have missed."

"I'm already on that," Harry responded.

Moody looked at Severus, Sirius and Remus thoughtfully before nodding. "I understand that, boy, but you'll need to train harder. According to our spies, Dumbledore has become a little loopy since your disappearance. If he thinks that you'll be a problem, then he'll come after you. You'll need to prepare."

"As I said, I've got that covered. Right now, Dumbledore thinks I'm incapacitated and I want him to continue to think that. I am going to use that time wisely, Moody. Don't worry. My friends and I are going away for a few weeks to train. You may not hear from us in that time," Harry told them.

"Where are you going?" Moody asked, his gaze suspicious.

Harry grinned, leaned towards the old Auror, and whispered, "It's a secret."

Moody blinked before roaring with laughter. "Of course it is. Good one on you, boy," he exclaimed, a grizzly smile on his face. "If you need any help, you just let me know. I'll be glad to train you."

"Thanks, Moody, but I think I have enough help. At least for now. Who knows what the future will bring."

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Several hours later, after his guests had left, Harry stood in the den, gazing at the fire, lost in thought. In an hour, he and the rest of his friends – no, family – would be going to the Cave. There he would learn to control his power. He would learn to fight, to become the weapon that Dumbledore had wanted him to become. He frowned slightly. While he wasn't quite prepared to become a weapon, he was smart enough to realize that he didn't really have a choice. He needed to learn to survive. He had two crazy men after him and he wasn't exactly in the mood to die.

Harry sighed softly. He wondered if fate was having a good laugh. All he had ever wanted was to be loved. He wanted to have a normal job, to get married, and to have children. He never wanted to be the Savior of the Wizarding World. He never wanted to be betrayed by those who he thought were his friends and family. He never wanted to be chased by a Dark Lord, intent on killing him. He never wanted to be molded into a weapon by a man who was only concerned by power. He just wanted to be Harry.

He was startled out of his brooding by a hand on his shoulder. He turned and blinked with surprise when he saw Severus. The Potions Master sat down on the couch next to him and sighed tiredly. Harry knew that they were becoming friends, and that Severus wasn't as prickly as he used to be, but Severus never touched him willingly, Severus never touched anyone willingly. He wasn't exactly approachable, and it made Harry feel warm to know that Severus would try to comfort him.

He gazed at Severus, looking at the craggy face, the deep lines of exhaustion after hours of potion making, and realized that Severus had become family. Harry would die to protect this man as he would Ron, Sirius, Dobby, and even Remus. They were his family, albeit a mildly dysfunctional family. This may not have been the family he had dreamed about when he was younger, but that was all right, it was still family. He was loved.

Smiling slightly, Harry leaned back against the couch, and sighed once again.

Severus cleared his throat and Harry glanced at him. He frowned slightly when he saw an uncomfortable look on the man's face.

"I'm not good at giving comfort. I haven't exactly had the experience. I would like to tell you that everything is going to be fine and that we are going to defeat the Headmaster and the Dark Lord, however, I can't," Severus stated.

Harry blinked.

Severus fidgeted, glanced at Harry quickly and seeing that Harry was staring at him, a bemused look on his face, he quickly moved his eyes back towards the fire.

"I know you feel that you have to train as hard as you can so that you can defeat the Dark Lord and Dumbledore. I understand that it feels like a burden that you have to bear. However, you should be aware that you are not alone in this; you have friends, you have a brother who wants to help you. They will be there with you, Harry, standing by your side, helping you along the way. You don't have to do this alone."

Harry swallowed hard and nodded. He understood what Severus was trying to say. His burden wasn't his alone. He had others with whom he could share it; others who would be with him, fighting with him and for him.

Severus cleared his throat, a tight look on his face. "I will also be there. You don't know what it means to me to be free of Dumbledore

and the Dark Lord. You were responsible for this and I never thought I would see that day that I would respect you, that I would....care," he bit out softly, "for what happens to you. However, you have become a...friend and I choose to stand by your side. And I thank you for giving me that choice."

Harry could feel his jaw drop. Severus admitted to caring for him. Harry smiled.

Severus glared at Harry. "However, if you tell anyone that I admitted such a thing to you, I will make your life a living hell. If you think I was bad at Hogwarts, just tell someone that I have feelings and I will show you how bad I can truly be," he snapped.

Harry stared at him a moment before smiling. "I won't. It would destroy the image of you being a git."

Severus grunted, got up from the couch and gave Harry one last look. Harry could see the slight smile tugging at the man's lips. He waited until Severus reached the doorway and called out.

"Severus!"

The man stopped and Harry knew he was listening.

"I care about you, too."

Severus stiffened a moment before giving a small nod and walked out of the room. Harry's glance went back to the fire and he gave a happy sigh. He may not have predicted that this would become his life, but he was happy. He finally had a family.

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Harry looked around the organized chaos that filled the foyer. The elves were popping in and out of the room, grabbing the trunks and other things that they would be taking with them to the Cave. While it would only be a few weeks for everyone outside of the Cave, time would go significantly faster inside. There was no way that anyone

wanted to leave to retrieve something they had forgotten so they made sure to pack everything they would need for several years.

Harry was excited to see the Golodh o en Calben village. Ever since Dobby told them about the history of the house-elves, he'd been wildly curious about their society. Dobby and he had spent many evenings talking about the day-to-day lives of the free elves and Harry came to realize that the life of a free elf was vastly different from the oppressed house-elves that the Wizarding World knew. Harry also realized that the Wizarding World was missing out on an extraordinary magical race. He knew that with the current climate at the Ministry, they wouldn't accept the Golodh o en Calben with open arms. Harry vowed to change that, somehow. The Golodh o en Calben deserved to live in the open and to be acknowledged as an independent and free race.

He watched Dobby run around the foyer, instructing the other elves, and smiled. Dobby had come a long way from that frightened, hyperactive house-elf that tried to protect Harry so many years ago. This Dobby was proud, fierce, and powerful. He was still hyperactive, but that was tempered by his new growth, both in power and in maturity. He knew that Dobby was excited to share the knowledge of the Golodh o en Calben with his friends; to finally be able to share what he had kept hidden, was making the little elf ecstatic.

Finally, the room was empty of all their personal items and it was just the six of them left. Harry was feeling anxious. He knew that once he left his castle, his training would begin in earnest. While he knew that he wasn't alone, he was still worried.

"Well, it looks as if everything is gone," Sirius stated, looking around the room one last time.

"If we forgot anything, I'm sure that one of the elves can bring it to us," Remus replied.

Sirius nodded and looked at his godson. "So, are you ready for this?" he asked.

Harry shrugged. "Is anyone ever ready for this?" he remarked.

Ron clapped him on the back. "Don't worry; we'll be there with you, learning right beside you."

Harry opened his mouth to reply, but was interrupted by the door of the castle opening. He turned and watched, amused, as a figure stumbled through the doorway.

"Wotcher, Harry!" Tonks called out.

Harry smiled. "It's nice to see that you have finally arrived," he commented wryly.

Tonks grinned. "Oh, I've been here a while. However, I was waylaid by Sage. She wanted to give me some instructions on how to care of her...friend, Dobby, while we were in the cave."

Everyone looked at Dobby, who blushed, but had a proud look on his face.

"Oooohhh, Dobby has a girlfriend," Sirius sing-songed.

Remus smacked him on the back of the head and everyone ignored the exclaimed, "Hey!"

"I see that the courting is going well," Remus stated.

"It is indeed," Dobby replied with smug smile.

Harry chuckled. Yeah, Dobby had come a long way from the timid house-elf he used to be.

"All right, everyone. If you are ready, gather around and we can finally leave," Dobby said.

"How are we getting there?" Remus asked.

"The Golodh o en Calben can make something similar to your portkey. The only way for those who are not Golodh o en Calbento get to the village is through this method of traveling. It's not normally allowed,

but you are all special cases. Please place your hands on the walking stick."

The gathered around Dobby and placed their hands on the stick. "Lye nuquernuva sen e dagor," Dobby muttered and they suddenly disappeared.

The room was quiet.

Suddenly, a voice rang throughout the castle. "It has begun!"

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Lye nuquernuva sen e dagor – Elvish - We will defeat them in battle

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Bellatrix Lestrange stared at the writhing Muggle in disgust. She usually enjoyed torturing the disgusting things, but for some reason, today she just wasn't in the mood. She sighed. Things had been tense since Potter disappeared and that werewolf had captured her.

She snarled as she remembered being hit by the spell that knocked her out. She was sure that she had knocked him out. She was so intent on killing her cousin once again that she hadn't even paid attention to what was going on behind her.

Waking up in the cells at the Ministry had not been fun. Luckily, the Dark Lord's spies in the Ministry had been busy finding a way to get her and her fellow Death Eaters out. The fools at the Ministry thought that a heavily warded cell would be better at keeping them imprisoned than the cells at Azkaban. That was a mistake; it took weeks, but after a hidden portkey and a few unconscious Aurors, they were free. Of course, the torture that the Dark Lord had put them through for being captured had Bella questioning whether she would've been safer at the Ministry.

Lord Voldemort was already angry about Potter's disappearance, but what pushed him over the edge was the capture of some of his top Death Eaters were captured pushed him over the edge. He was frustrated by the lack of information on Potter's whereabouts. Now his Potion's Master was missing and it was well known that he was traitor. There hadn't been a sign of either of them since they left Hogwarts. Lord Voldemort was sure that they were together, along with the Weasley boy.

The Dark Lord wanted to find Potter while he was still catatonic, since he believed he would be easier to kill. There would be no chance that the prophecy could take effect if Potter wasn't aware of surroundings. The Dark Lord still didn't know what the prophecy was, but if there was any small chance that Potter's condition would stop it from coming true, and then he wanted to take it.

Bella looked around at her fellow Death Eaters and prayed to gods that she didn't believe in that the Dark Lord would find Potter soon.

The amount of Cruciatus curses that had been flying around had risen since the boy's disappearance and Snape's became worse with defection.

She watched as her fellow Death Eaters tortured the Muggles, her gaze flat and cold. Her fellow Death Eaters felt that they had needed this Revel to relieve the tension that was endemic within the Death Eater ranks. Even though she wasn't getting anything out of the torture, her fellow companions were. She watched as Crabbe Sr. throw a cutting curse at a young girl; the accompanying scream made the dimwitted wizard smile ferally.

They had picked a Muggle family that lived on a small farm. The isolation of the farm gave them time to torture, rape, and kill the family. The father of the young girl was lying on the ground, his mouth open in a silent scream as his terrified eyes moved between the torture of his daughter and the rape of his wife.

Bella grimaced when she Avery grinned wildly as his gaze settled on the man's teenage son and the family dog. She knew of the wizard's sick fascination with bestiality. She knew what was coming, and couldn't help a flash disgust as Avery moved closer. She turned away so not to see the rape of the young man by the family dog.

The boy screamed as he saw the family dog coming towards him, his eyes wild with animal lust. He tried to crawl away, but his legs wouldn't move. Avery laughed manically as the dog snarled at the movement and with a wave of his wand, he made the boy's clothes disappear. Avery looked at the scene with anticipation gleaming in his eyes, and he licked his lips several times. The rest of the Death Eaters had paused in their torture when they heard the boy scream and they roared their approval.

There was a sudden flash of light and Avery suddenly fell to the ground, his control over the dog disappearing. With a yelp, the dog turned and ran away. The Death Eaters froze, surprised. Bella looked in the direction that the spell had come from. She stared at the two cloaked men, her eyes wide. They both exuded power. The shorter wizard almost glowed with magic. The air crackled with energy and she almost took a step back in fear. She had never felt this much

power in any wizard before. The closest was the Dark Lord, but his power was dark. The shorter wizard was filled with light and it hurt to be near him.

Bella shook off her fear and glared at the two wizards. It didn't matter who they were. They were only two, while she had ten Death Eaters with her.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"Your worst nightmare!" the tall cloaked figure replied while the smaller one snickered.

Bella growled at the disrespect; she hated the flippancy from her inferiors – from anyone, actually. How dare they! They should be cowering with fear at her feet. She was one of the best Death Eaters the Dark Lord had. She struck fear in men's hearts and these two wizards before her weren't cowering. She couldn't understand it. They were being insolent. She wouldn't allow that. She would teach them to fear her.

"How dare you interrupt us, let alone attack one of us!" she yelled.

"Yeah, yeah. You're the Death Eaters. You're all powerful. We should fear you, we should be trembling at your very presence," the tall wizard stated sarcastically. "Did I miss anything?"

The smaller wizard chuckled. "Yeah, you did. You forgot that they would make us pay for our insolence."

"Ah, yes! Right then." There was a moment of silence and the man sighed, "Hello! I'm waiting."

Bella's eyes narrowed and she raised her wand, directing it at the taller man. "Crucio," she screamed.

The taller wizard waited until the spell was almost upon him then twisted his body and the spell flew by him uselessly. Bella frowned. She threw the curse at him again, followed by another. The cloaked figure proceeded to twist out of the way of the spells.

"Well, that was so unexpected," the wizard stated wryly.

"Gee, a Death Eater throwing an Unforgivable. Whatever is the world coming to?" the smaller wizard snarked. The taller cloaked figure laughed.

Bella's eyes grew colder. "Avada Kedavra," she yelled.

The green light headed towards the smaller wizard. There was a flash of red, a musical cry and a red blur swooped down, swallowing the spell before disappearing in flash of flames.

Bella gaped. The wizard had a phoenix. The only phoenix that she knew of was Fawkes, Dumbledore's familiar. This would not do.

"Attack!" she screamed. "Kill them both!"

The Death Eaters advanced and began to throw curses.

The smaller wizard raised his hand, and a shield surrounded both of the wizards. The curses bounced off harmlessly. Bella blinked, her eyes wide.

"Wow! I never thought I would see the Black bitch speechless," the smaller wizards said into the silence.

The taller wizard snickered and Bella's face grew red. With a nod to her fellow Death Eaters, she began to throw spell after spell at the two mysterious wizards. Bella caught her breath at the almost casual way the wizards were batting or blocking the spells. She'd never seen this type of fighting, this lack of concern for their safety. She could swear she saw the smaller wizard yawn, but it was too dark to really see past the hood of the cloak.

"I'm bored," the taller wizard stated.

"Okay, well do something about it then. Once we finish here, we can eat. I hear that we're having roast beef tonight."

With a sudden movement that took Bella by surprise, the two wizards burst into action. Where they had been nonchalant earlier, they were now intent and focused. Throwing spell after spell, they began to take down the Death Eaters one by one. Bella could only watch as those that came with her were stunned, bound, and gagged. With desperation, Bella began to scream out dark spell after dark spell. She wasn't ready to be captured again. She would rather die than to displease her Lord.

She hissed in pain as a cutting hex hit her arm. She raised her wand and screamed once more, "Avada Kedavra!"

She almost cried with frustration as the smaller wizard just moved out of the way of the spell. Who were these two? They fought like no wizards she had ever seen before. They were formidable and powerful. She needed to escape. She had to report this to the Dark Lord.

She threw another curse, but this time she aimed it towards the young man who lay on the ground, watching the battle. Bella watched as the two wizards turned towards the young man and grabbed the serpent pendant that she was wearing and activated the portkey. She laughed wildly as she saw the young man turn towards her when he realized that she was escaping. She grinned at him maliciously because although they were extremely powerful, she had killed the young man and made good her escape. Powerful or not, they could still be beaten. Within a several seconds, she was gone from the farmhouse and standing in front of the Dark Lord.

Wincing, she knelt in front of Voldemort and began her report. "My Lord, we might have a problem." With trepidation, she told him of the two wizards who defeated the six other Death Eaters. She only hoped she got through the night with her life.

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"Damn it!" the smaller wizard yelled.

"Harry," the other wizard began.

"No, Ron. We had her. We had that bitch in our sights and she still got away. While she may not have actually killed Sirius, she would have if it had truly been him. She has already escaped once. I can't believe she got away!" Harry yelled as he waved his hands in the air.

"We'll get her next time," Ron said soothingly.

Harry snorted. "We better." He walked over to the young man who Bella killed and sighed. He hadn't been able to save him. What good was all this power if he could even save an innocent?

He grouped all the unconscious Death Eaters together, before grabbing a stick to make a Portkey with. When placed on the stunned wizards and activated it would send them to the Ministry. Harry just hoped that this time the Ministry would be able to keep them locked up. He then carried the young man's body over to rest with the bodies of his family. Harry bowed his head and mourned the loss of one more Muggle family.

Ron stepped up next to him, grabbed his shoulder, and squeezed, trying to give some comfort. "There was nothing you could do, Harry, unfortunately, we can't save them all."

Harry nodded, knowing that it was true. He just hated it. He sighed, turned to his brother and smiled weakly. "Come on, we need to get back. We need to let the others know what happened here. Anyway, Severus needs his herbs; you know how cranky he gets when he doesn't get them in time."

Ron chuckled. "Yeah, he does get mite cranky."

Harry laughed and they both disappeared without a sound.

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Dumbledore looked out the window of his castle. Hogwarts may belong to the Wizarding World, but he always thought of it as his. He believed that it was something that should belong to him because he was the most powerful wizard in centuries. He hated the fact that he would never own it; that he would never know the true power of the castle.

Only the descendants of the Founders could access the power of the castle, and they were all dead. If he couldn't have the power, then no one could.

The sound of a house-elf popping into the room brought him out of his thoughts. He sighed, turned, and walked over to his desk. Sitting down, he watched as the house-elf put the tray down on the desk. With a small bow, the house-elf disappeared. Dumbledore took his wand out, pointed it at the teapot, and checked for any mysterious potions or charms. He still was getting Howlers from the last time he'd been affected by a potion in his tea. He still didn't know who sent the picture of him to the Dailey Prophet, but if he ever found out, there would be hell to pay.

He made a cup of tea. Sipping the hot beverage, he looked at the paper that was lying on his desk.

WHERE IS HARRY POTTER?

By Rita Skeeter

It has been four months since the disappearance of our Savior. Where has he gone? Who is going to save us from You Know Who? It has come to this reporter's attention that the information that Headmaster Dumbledore gave us about our Savior recovering at Hogwarts from his stay in Azkaban is wrong. According to a source, who shall stay nameless for fear of their life, Harry Potter disappeared from Hogwarts, where Dumbledore said that Harry was staying, four months ago.

My source informed me that Mr. Potter was taken from Hogwarts by his best friend, Ron Weasley. It is well known that Mr. Weasley never lost faith in his best friend. He defended Harry Potter until after the trial. It is understandable that due the efforts of You Know Who and Lucius Malfoy that Mr. Weasley's faith may have faltered. After the truth about Mr. Potter came to light, Mr. Weasley took Mr. Potter away from Hogwarts. Where did they go?

Is it true that the reason Mr. Weasley took Mr. Potter away was to keep him safe? It is not well known, but according to my source, Harry

Potter has never recovered from his stay in Azkaban. I was informed that Mr. Potter has been catatonic since he was released.

My source also tells me that Mr. Potter was concerned that if something ever happened to him that would leave him incapacitated, our revered Headmaster would try to gain custody of Mr. Potter and his assets. Could it be that Headmaster Dumbledore is not the kind, wise wizard we always thought? Could there be something more sinister to Mr. Potter's actions? Could there be a reason that Mr. Potter made sure that he would stay out of the Headmaster's hands? Could it be that our dear Savior feared the Headmaster?

This reporter wants to know. If our dear Savior feared the Headmaster, who then should we fear? What is it that Albus Dumbledore is hiding? I urge you to find out and let this reporter know.

As for the location of Harry Potter, where is he? How is he? Will he be able to protect us from Who-Know-Who when the time comes? This reporter begs the hero to come back. Come back, Harry. Please protect us once again.

Dumbledore slammed the paper down on the desk, his eyes fierce. After years of suppressing the truth about his actions, there was doubt about him in the Wizarding World. Who could have told Rita about Harry? It was supposed to be a secret. The members in the Order were under strict orders not to tell anyone. Was it Severus? Mr. Weasley or whatever his name was now? He didn't think it was. If it had been, they would have told the paper months ago. So who was it?

He hated the feeling that he was losing control of things. His carefully constructed world was falling to pieces, one piece at a time. First, his weapon was sent to Azkaban, even though it wasn't Harry's fault. Dumbledore didn't predict the cleverness of Tom. The plan that sent Harry to Azkaban was truly worthy of a Slytherin. He just never thought that Tom would come up with something like that.

After the loss of Harry, things began to go downhill. He was too old. There was no way that he could defeat Tom. That was why he carefully maneuvered Harry into being the Boy Who Lived,

Dumbledore's Golden Boy. Once Harry and Tom died in the Final Battle, Dumbledore would be the one who basked in the attention that would come from the fact that he was the Leader of the Light that brought about the defeat of the Dark Lord, and was Mentor of the Boy-Who-Lived.

Once it was known that Harry was truly innocent, Dumbledore felt as if everything was back on track. Of course, that feeling didn't last long. The fact that Harry was catatonic was distressing, but not unsurpassable. He knew that if he got custody of Harry, he could mould Harry to be the perfect weapon. He, of course, got another shock. Who knew that Harry hadn't trusted him? He never knew. He thought he had his weapon under his control. It was shocking to find out that he wasn't.

Finding out that Harry named Ron his Guardian upset him. The fact that Ron took Harry away from Hogwarts and out of his control enraged him. He'd been unable to find a trace of either of them, no matter what spell or ritual he used.

Severus leaving him was definitely something that he never thought would happen. There'd been too many spells on the Potions Master. There was no way that he could have escaped. Apparently, he'd been wrong. Very wrong. He still didn't know how Severus did it and like Harry and Ron, he'd been unable to find a trace of where he was.

Now this article in the Dailey Prophet. When did he lose control and what was going to do to get it back?

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, his forehead furrowed with thought. He didn't know exactly what he was going to do, but the first thing he needed was Harry back under control and the only way to do that was to get rid of the one thing that was standing in his way.

Ron Weasley.

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Hermione looked down at the paper, her gaze satisfied. She knew that Rita Skeeter wouldn't miss writing the story. Causing a scandal

was the reporter's forte. She was slowly destroying the Headmaster's reputation, something that he valued. There were going to be more articles in the papers as more secrets about Harry, Ron, and the Headmaster were released. By the time that everything was done and over with, the Headmaster's good standing with the Wizarding World would be gone. Hermione knew how fast the Wizarding World turned its heroes.

It was the least she could do for her missing friends. The guilt for her betrayal would never leave her, but helping them in her own way would ease her conscience.

Just an FYI...Harry Potter is NOT going to suddenly gain access to the Power of Hogwarts, nor is Ron. They are not the descendants of the Founders. I figured Harry was powerful enough on his own. In fact, I can't decide who will be. I'm waffling on picking the person. It totally depends on how the story writes itself out.